

The Life and Practice of Moses Williams

Online Lecture with Carol Soltis and Lauren Muney

Presented by The Peale, Baltimore's Community Museum | August 16, 2024

Nancy ([00:00:06](#)):

All right, it looks like we are at the top of the hour. We've got a really packed program today, so we're going to go ahead and get started. First, my name is Nancy Proctor. I'm Chief Strategy Officer and founding director at the Peale and it's my great honor to welcome you to today's online lecture by Lauren Muney and Dr. Carol Soltis, which is part of a new permanent exhibition at the Peale about the life and work of the American artist Moses Williams. This project has been financed in part with state funds from the Maryland Heritage Area Authority, an instrumentality of the state of Maryland. However, project contents or opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Maryland Heritage Area's Authority. If you're unfamiliar with us, the Peale is Baltimore's Community Museum housed in the first museum ever built in the Americas. Our building was opened in 1814 by American Artist Rembrandt Peale and we're celebrating its 210th birthday this Saturday with an open house and birthday bash from 10:00 AM until 4:00 PM Please join us.

([00:01:14](#)):

The Peale's mission today is to provide local creators and storytellers with the space and support they need to create a complete and accessible cultural legacy for the city of Baltimore and to help diversify the workforce in the arts through our apprenticeship program and fellowships. I'd like to thank everyone who donated to the Peale while reserving their free ticket for today's talks. Your support makes it possible for us to host the incredibly diverse and impactful programming that our Communities create in our historic building and online. If you haven't yet given to the Peale, we have challenged ourselves to raise \$21,000 in honor of the museum's 210th birthday by Labor Day. Your gift will help us fund all the incredible work that goes into the programs we present, including all of the behind-the-scenes labor of the Peale staff and Community partners that often goes unnoticed, but without which the Peale would fall once again into darkness and disuse.

([00:02:15](#)):

There are very few grants and other sources that fund basic operating costs for nonprofits, and although our historic building is owned by the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, the Peale doesn't get any funding for its running costs from the city. So please dig deep and help ensure that the Peale will be here for Communities in Baltimore and beyond for another 210 years. The Peale's mission is about amplifying and sharing the voices and stories that too often have been overlooked or intentionally erased from the historical record. So, before we get started, I'd like to acknowledge that the Peale in Baltimore stands on the traditional ancestral lands of a number of indigenous peoples, including the Piscataway and the Susquehanna. Our work is ongoing to better understand the pre-colonial history of our city and region, and also to support the indigenous peoples who are part of our Communities today.

([00:03:07](#)):

I'd like to thank Ryan Coons and Maryland State Arts Council for their land acknowledgement references that they've made available to us and to local indigenous leaders like Ashley Minner Jones for ensuring that indigenous voices are heard and recognized in Baltimore today. You can pick up your free copy of the illustrated Guide to East Baltimore's historic American Indian Reservation walking tour map from the Peale and also download the guide to indigenous Baltimore app for free. Just a couple of housekeeping notes. Please keep your mics on mute until the end of the program and we will ask questions. You can add those questions to the chat, and we'll try to answer them all. We'd like to thank Travis, ASL

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interpreter for joining us. If you'd like to turn on closed captions during the live portion of the broadcast, roll over or click show captions.

[\(00:04:01\)](#):

However, the main presentation portion of this program is pre-recorded and is already captioned, so you may want to turn off your auto captions in Zoom while that is playing so you don't have double captions. So today first we're going to hear from the artist Lauren Muney, who has been working in the traditional portrait form of scissor cut profiles and silhouettes for almost 17 years. She cut silhouettes at public, corporate and community events, museums and in public art programs across the globe. You may have seen her at the Smithsonian Institution, the Kennedy Center, the New York Design Center in countless other locations with support from the Maryland State Arts Council, she also created the Peale faces profiles that are installed in the Peale Museum portraying almost 300 people all across Baltimore. She recently completed a research fellowship in experimental archeology at Colonial Williamsburg and also learned to make scissors in Sheffield, England.

[\(00:05:04\)](#):

After Lauren's presentation, you'll hear from Carol Soltis. Carol holds an AB and a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. In 2006 she joined the museum to research and display Robert Al McNeil Jr's gift of his Peale collection, her book, the Art of the Peales Adaptations and Innovations from Yale University Press Documents PMA Now Unparalleled Peale collection and in 2018 was cited by the Athena of Philadelphia as an outstanding work of nonfiction by a Philadelphia author. Previously her exhibition in catalog Rembrandt Peale a Life in the Arts from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania led to six years with the Peale family papers at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery where she assembled a catalog [inaudible] of the artist's work. Co-curated the exhibition in pursuit of fame. Rembrandt Peale 1778 to 1860 and contributed to its catalog, a former member of the board of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[\(00:06:10\)](#):

She's an emerita board member of the Library Company of Philadelphia as well. You'll find longer bios for these esteemed presenters in the event page on the Peale's website, and I believe my colleagues are going to put those links in the chat now as well. Carol and Lauren will answer questions after their presentations and are happy to stay past the hour for anyone who doesn't need to leave by 1:00 PM and Travis has also agreed to accompany us past the top of the hour so as not to waste any further time with my chatter. Let's get started. So, let's see.

Lauren [\(00:06:59\)](#):

Thanks to everyone attending. My name is Lauren Muney. I'm a traditional silhouette artist using only scissors and paper to create this traditional and beloved portrait form for modern communities. I hope to introduce you to Moses Williams' technical abilities and the world. He enters his story, captured my attention in my research and studies and I hope it captures yours. I'll bring into focus this artist of color who as I will explain, arrived at a particular era of social and political upheavals to make a very long artistic career with exquisite detail, providing a vital service in a unique location, one of the first museums in America. In my short time I hope to give you thoughts to seek underneath academic writings to appreciate Moses' technical work with shout volumes that most people cannot hear. Moses

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Williams was a young mixed-race boy who came into the household of museum entrepreneur Charles Willson Peale.

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He worked in the museum and possibly made tens of thousands support style likeness as the representation was supposed to be like the person. There were many other words like black shade, shadow and more names, but not necessarily made with a shadow silhouette. This came from the name of a French finance minister at Tie de Silhouette who was hated by wealthy people in France for asking the wealthy to pay taxes. They considered him cheap and therefore anything cost cutting was called Allah. Silhouette profiles were considered cheap versions of painted portraits. This word for black portraits came into use after 1830 to raise the status of exceptionally fine all black profiles, especially by detailed artists. We currently use the phrase silhouette and profile interchangeably in our modern English language. I will attempt to lay out the subjects surrounding Moses' work. Portraits and thoughts came before Moses, what tools Moses was using, why was his work different, how you can see his talent and what people do with his portraits.

[\(00:09:32\)](#):

Painted portraits before the revolution were only for the wealthy. Often the cost was equivalent to one or more months wage for the common worker. So, the rich had portraits made. People underneath the uppermost class couldn't have portraits made due to the expense and also the amount of time that the person would have to sit for the portrait. Earlier than the 1870s, there was little opportunity for the common American to have a cheap portrait made unless one knew a profile maker. Personally. There were few around, but it wasn't common, and travel was difficult outside of certain regions. After the revolution and into the construction of the new society, there was more opportunity for income. Independent thinkers and workers and artists. Society changed for many types of people over in Europe. New thoughts and activities were arising about self-image, government science, and even the values promoting the common man.

[\(00:10:31\)](#):

During the late 17 hundreds, there was a new appreciation of the natural world. There's even a new term natural history, which is the early word for our sciences of physics, botany, biology and zoology. People started classifying plants and animals into orderly units, which could explain the unity of the natural world and people started classifying people to understand them too. In this atmosphere, Charles Willson Peale started the Peale Museum, which would eventually contain Moses' profile machine. During the 16 hundred and 17 hundred, there was no formal job market even for the dominant society. All people were in cultured to be productive from a young age serving a trade household, farm or industry. The process was this, very young children were contracted by their parents or if orphans to the local parish, to a master in a trade farmer, children worked on the farm and may also work in a separate trade as well. This system of learning from master tradesmen was called indenture. It was also known informally to us as the apprentice system. Charles Willson Peale was apprenticed to a saddler. He eventually discovered that with hard work one didn't need to follow a prescribed apprenticeship path or even be limited to one profession.

[\(00:11:59\)](#):

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When he established his museum, Peale required his children to work for him often in difficult conditions as if they were indentured. He exerted the same pressure on himself, but self-pressure is different. Moses Williams, as an enslaved youth, seemed to have been treated as well or as poorly as anyone in the Peale family and required to participate in the family business of working in the museum. It could have been this family pressure, even a personal interest, which sparked Moses', Moses to pick up the scissors. We don't know. For a millennium, people had been judging others by facial features from the Greek into the medieval era. It was thought that the soul was centered in the middle of the head, pushing the skull bones outwards so the soul could be read by anyone. Johann Kaspar Lavater from Zurich remade this idea of judging people to be an orderly scientific like method of classification.

[\(00:12:58\)](#):

He wrote a book about it in the late 1770s. He considered it the knowledge of man to look at the face, to understand the so Lavater wrote additional books which became international sensations, teaching people how to judge other people by their faces. He used profiles to describe common faces and the meanings of their shapes. There were pocket size books to make judging others easier and faster. The books were translated into many languages and eventually served as science until the 20th century. Dark profiles were considered the perfect way to see the facial features and therefore to see the soul. Underneath Charles Willson Peale seized on this classification of people with the same enthusiasm that he classified animals in his museum. He took Physiognomy into his museum by commissioning a machine to trace the face and therefore to provide access into seeing the soul within the profile. As an aside, this abuse of written knowledge under the guise of real science spread quickly to many continents as a claim to discriminate against some peoples and elevate other peoples. We now call this pre-judgment by the face profiling. We do know from his white writings that Peale respected people whose profiles he felt showed a good soul.

[\(00:14:30\)](#):

Physiognotrace machines were invented by various people in France and Germany. First, the original designs were made to create full-size exact portraits, then engravings and then to reduce the final portrait to make many copies. You'll hear me in this presentation, use both pronunciations, physiognotrace, the English version of the word physiognotrace, the French version of the word interchangeably. Charles Willson Peale requested to inventor John Isaac Hawkins to make him a similar machine so that profiles could be made in the Peale Museum promoting the concept of understanding nature, physiognomy and to also get additional public attention for his museum. Traveling inventors, not always artists created and toured the new United States with similar devices because they too sense the opportunity to make income. Most operators ignored the entire concept of reading the profile to see the soul. Customers who entered the Peale museum in Philadelphia would pay 25 cents to enter the museum and 50 more cents if they wanted to see the woolly mammoth bones.

[\(00:15:47\)](#):

To be clear, these would've been big sums of money to a common laborer. 25 cents was half a day's wage for a common laborer. So, this meant that most visitors to the museum were of the middle or higher economic classes. If visitors wanted a portrait, they would pay 1 cent to operate the ana trace machine themselves. Paper, scissors and the machine were provided by the museum. This machine essentially traced around the face with a stylus of metal. Simultaneously, the machine's action reduced

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the tracing using a pantograph at the top of the machine, A stylus or pencil, excuse me, recreates the resulting tiny profile. The final image is only a fraction of the size of the person's real head and is not yet cut out. But the machine was complicated to operate correctly and was very difficult to cut inside the lines of the trace portrait.

[\(00:16:53\):](#)

Here is my attempt to show you in brief how Moses may have worked his portraits. My example is quick and does not show you the details of his exquisite [inaudible]. As I said, the machine was located in Peale's Philadelphia museum starting in 1803 for 6 cents raised later to 8 cents. Visitors to Peale's museum could hire a machine operator, Moses Williams, to create their exact profile likeness by tracing the face of the visitor who paid for this effort. 8 cents was probably the cost of a middle-class dinner. It was never cheap to get her profile, but it was more affordable to the middle class than spending months or a year's pay. On a painted portrait, Moses was allowed to keep the money himself. He became, in essence, the master of the profile machine.

[\(00:17:46\):](#)

Moses recuts with scissors, the silhouette by the physiognotrace machine. The machine used a stylus to trace around the person's face. It is uncomfortable to have an object scraping around your face, so the machine does not capture the exact shape. So, the face, well an observer and can look at this image right here to see the outsized machine marks left in the soft paper. Moses obviously had a good observation of anatomy and was able to recut the shape of the person's face after the paper was removed. For the machine, he probably recut the profile freehand, but with the machine-made profile as a slight guide. Please note these portraits are so small it takes very delicate scissor work to make the turns in the paper. The paper size is four by five, but the silhouette size is only about two inches by three inches.

[\(00:18:54\):](#)

We know these silhouettes were cut at the Peale museum because of the museum stamp underneath the silhouettes. But Moses, like many profile artists, seems to have never signed any profile. This was very common. We can assume that it was made by Moses because he was frequently complimented by Peale as the best operator of the machine. Moses displayed significant talent, especially as a self-taught artist. Hollow cut silhouettes are very difficult to cut because cutting inside the paper can catch the scissors on the paper. The blockhead, which is the center of the paper, and the hollow cut profile had to be exact because the blockhead, the very center part was saved and often used in [inaudible] studies. I think due to the needed precision to read personality from the profile, excellent profiles were at least encouraged and possibly demanded by Peale himself. These light color blockheads cast off of the silhouettes were mounted on handmade black paper and often saved commercially black, excuse me, commercially made colored paper was just recently invented but no black paper yet Moses used tiny scissors as seen in this ad for his lost scissors.

[\(00:20:26\):](#)

It was Moses' success in making silhouettes, which won him financial freedom as well as being released from his enslavement one year earlier than the law permitted. It was culturally required that all independent adults make their own living and Moses seemed to have made an excellent living cutting silhouettes potentially between \$500 and \$700 a year during an era when \$300 was an average wage for

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a man working at labor. He worked as a profile artist for 30 years. During a time when most profile artists worked for an average of only four years, it was extraordinary for people to pay cash to a man of color in the early 1800s. Many physiognotrace profiles by other people look blobby as you could see by this example in this slide. But Moses's tiny silhouettes looked delicate with precise personal details. Moses' talent benefited by being connected to a museum and not itinerant provided him with encouragement and support and a constant supply of customers from the beginning, plus with a scientific setting to show his professionalism.

[\(00:21:48\)](#):

Here are example silhouettes of his talent. I'll try to explain, but the silhouettes are best seen in person. Authentic silhouettes are small, sometimes half the size of your palm example a I saw this exact same silhouette in two cities and this album in Colonial Williamsburg first and then in an album at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The one in Colonial Williamsburg was a family album, so it was a family album. So, I imagine the copies were given to family members. The one A was backed by black silk and stone into the family album. You could see the marks not only you could see the silk peeping out the top of that white paper. You could see the black silk behind it, and you could see the sewn marks that are not only attaching the black silk to the white hollow cut paper, but those sewn marks are sewing the entire thing down to the blue paper.

[\(00:23:01\)](#):

The blue paper is actually the blue of the album itself, and by looking at the blue paper, it may be the type of blue paper that was wrapped around sugar cones. That's the way sugar came in the late 17 hundreds and early 18 hundreds. It was a new idea to be able to have expensive portraits of relatives or friends and to have enough copies of these portraits to give away. This was an outstanding concept as well as a new marketing idea, which the Peales especially used in their creative genius to create initial and then long lasting fervor for their profiles and for Moses' work the entire album in which I found example A was hand sewn into a handmade silhouettes album just like you would create an album of family photos. It was in fact what you might consider as an early photo album, but without the photos.

[\(00:24:08\)](#):

In February 1803, Peale placed an ad in the American Daily advertiser recommending that the public make profiles to give away to their loved ones. A couple of the quotes from the ad are shown here at the right in this slide. This was a brand-new concept just invented in this era only available with inexpensive portraits. Remember, before this era, portraits were painted one off and expensive. So, silhouette B had the bottom shows Charles Willson Peale's daughter sister with added India ink curls and ruffle details. This ink was not very common with Peale museum silhouettes, but I suspect it may have been more common when there were no customer lines, or it was connected to a family member. The lines of the sink are very fine, carefully studied how real curls are made, the artist probably Moses was an exquisite observer.

[\(00:25:12\)](#):

There is speculation in academic papers on the artist and his thoughts about himself. Without a concrete diary from Moses, we can never know how he considered himself. Several academic scholars point to this portrait as a self-portrait who named himself cutter profiles at the bottom as a way to seek attention. So, let's look at the work itself from a technical point of view. I suggest that in the light of the

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many graceful profiles I have seen and the glowing respectful descriptions from Charles Willson Peale for Moses' work, I suggest that this cutting is too crude to be Moses delicate cutting unless he was having a really bad day. In addition, this handwriting does not seem to fit the traditional penmanship taught in the early 19th century. Moses Williams, as we know from his records with the Peale family, was taught to read and write. I suggest that this is the writing of the early 20th century.

[\(00:26:20\)](#):

Moses may have stopped working in 1833, so why did Moses end his successful silhouette enterprise? We do not clearly know Moses left no diary nor letters that we know of at least. So please allow me to extrapolate about the 1830s silhouettes, portraiture and photography. Here's my educated guess from studying the eras. It's my current belief that Moses silhouette business came to a slow close with the decreased interest in profiles due to the many artists, good and bad and the untalented RA operated breeders who flooded the Mid-Atlantic in the early 18 hundreds. Silhouettes history shows a decline of interest in silhouettes around 1830. I think that additional portrait forms arose such as what you now consider folk art and profiles started to get a bad name due to the bad operators, charlatans, or an over full marketplace in many parts of the country. Perhaps changes within the Peale museum may have had an influence too.

[\(00:27:30\)](#):

However, in the late 1830s all new freehand artists would pick up the profile business again, renamed profiles as silhouettes and start a new making exceptional black silhouettes. They discarded machines and focused only on hand cutting or hand painting with the eye alone. Many people say that photography killed off the silhouette business. However, while photography did enter some major population centers in the 1840s, it was not commonly popular nor cheap until much later in the century. So, it looks like other forces paused the silhouette business in the short time, allowing new artists to soon reinvigorate the trade. Thanks to people like Moses Williams who's finally detailed anonymous portraits stitched together family bombs because profiles were often placed together in those handmade albums, we're able to see the value of portraits far before photography was accessible and affordable. In addition, the excellent silhouettes in Moses' time, perhaps his own work has kept silhouettes in the public eye all the way until the 21st century. It has never really died out. Moses' talent will live on albeit without his signature on his work as the face of hundreds of thousands of portraits in early America. Thank you. It's been a real pleasure to help shed light on an exceptional early American artist of any skin color. Moses Williams.

Carol [\(00:29:15\)](#):

Lauren, thank you for that wonderful introduction to the world of profiles. I hope that together we can establish a new level of understanding about the life and art of Moses Williams researching the detail, the details of the life of Moses who was born into slavery is a challenging project and when that Dean m and Ellen Fernandez Sako have been working on with the Peale Center for a while, but finding straightforward, accurate data on the lives of members of the African-American community into which Moses was born is a difficult task. Dean and Ellen's fine work is ongoing today. I'd like to share with you what I've learned about Moses so far in the context of the life and work of the artist Charles Willson Peale, his family and his Philadelphia museum where Moses worked for over 30 years. It's here that we

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find firsthand accounts of the ways in which Moses excelled and contributed as well as hints of his personality and various skills.

[\(00:30:18\)](#):

But it is also here that we see a man caught in the middle inhabiting a space in between being a member of the family and his identity as a slave indentured servant and employee. And Charles Willson Peale's physical description of him as mulatto that is racially neither fully white nor fully black, seems only to reinforce this however Moses stood apart in another way. The profiles he cut appear in Philadelphia Museum are exceptional and we'll conclude this presentation with an up-close look at a selection of profiles from an album assembled by the Peale Sellers family of their relatives and friends. Now in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum, Charles Willson Peale, let's see, sorry, here we go. In 1784, Charles Willson Peale opened his painting room adjacent to his home on Pine Street to display a group of portraits he was painting to honor individuals who had been part of the American Revolution.

[\(00:31:31\)](#):

In 1786, the collection had expanded considerably, and he added a dedicated gallery space to his portrait, his house for his portraits, for new science exhibits, and for a life-size wax sculpture of himself. He then announced his collection was formally open to the public as Peale's museum. By 1795, ethnographic objects representing various cultures have been added and as his collections continue to grow, he moved his family and his collections into the new building belonging to the American Philosophical Society. This building right here that you can see in the birch print of 1799, his building of the American Philosophical Society, which still stands and at the little doorway entrance here into the park area, is the sign museum, which you probably unfortunately cannot see in this slide. But this was where Peale's museum moved into in 1795. It later expanded into Independence Hall with Pennsylvania State House called the Pennsylvania State House that we now know as Independence Hall.

[\(00:32:39\)](#):

In 1802 in December of 1802, he added a machine created by his friend, the English inventor John Hawkins, for cutting profiles for visitors, which was called the physiognotrace. And it was in this space seen here in Peale's self-portrait, the artist in his museum, that Moses Williams began his career as profile cutter. Here, museum visitors could obtain their own portraits and those of family and friends in the context of Peale's growing gallery of portraits of noted American and European soldiers, politicians, writers, artists, inventors and scientists. Painted by Charles James and Rembrandt Peale Peale's portraits were typically displayed above his carefully organized, preserved specimens and in some diorama settings, Peale viewed this as a united collection of what he called the wonderful works of nature man and the natural world. And on the slide, you can see here the portraits along the very top and then the installations of the natural science specimens along the wall. Moses was probably initially right in this area here in the museum, although he may have moved around over time.

[\(00:34:06\)](#):

And just to see the context here, this is a very early portrait of Anthony Wayne from the American Revolution and then of Robert Fulton. So, we have inventors, and we have patriots, and then we have profiles of people cut. This is the Peale family group, but you want to think one of the nice things is thinking about these profiles in the context of the Peale Museum and the Peale portrait collection and the coming here, there was sort of this sense of you too could have your portrait made. So, Moses and

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the Peale family is a special topic of course, and he came into the Peale family through his parents, John and Lucy Williams, usually calls Scarborough and Peale. We had received them as payments for portrait commissions possibly as early as 1774 in Maryland, three years before the Peales relocated to Philadelphia, officially freed by Peale In 1786, John and Lucy left the Peale household, but 9-year-old Moses remained born in 1776.

[\(00:35:18\)](#):

Moses was not covered by the gradual emancipation Act for the abolition of slavery that stated SL children born after 1780 or free at age 28, but perhaps following the practice of Moses' parents who would adventure their younger children once they were free. Peale followed the indenture guidelines with Moses despite his enslaved status. This included making sure he was taught to read and write and learned a trade. Moses learned many skills as he grew up working in Peale's museum other than reading and writing. And when it quickly became clear that he was adept at working the museum's new physiognotrace although he was not yet 28, Charles emancipated him.

[\(00:36:09\)](#):

Although Moses likely performed many tasks that Peale's numerous children did not like most of them, he was trained to work in the museum in taxidermy to capture specimens and to assist in creating displays, crafting labels, et cetera. In June 1799, Peale recorded an example of this activity in a letter to a French naturalist and zoologist with whom he traded specimens for the growth of their respective natural history collections. He wrote, I hired a man who kept Mr. Baker's museum at New York to assist me. He's an excellent collector of insects and I have taught him to mount birds in a tolerable good mode. Moses has now also acquired considerable handling of them. I have just returned from the sea where I have taught them so well that much of this labor in the future will be taken off my hands and I also made a beginning to teach Rubens and Sophonisba, that's two of his children, how to help me and my preparations.

[\(00:37:10\)](#):

Therefore, it is by this combined aid. In a short time, I may promise myself liberty to study and draw up a course of lectures on natural science. So, you can see how integrated Moses became the most notable event, however, Moses work in the museum prior to the arrival of the physiognotrace in 1802 was his work on the reconstruction of the Mastodon, the Mastodon. Here you see the portrait of the sort of history painting that Charles Willson and Peale created of the event that the exhumation of this giant mastodon in New York state that he undertook. It was the most scientifically important and internationally newsworthy event related to Peale's museum at that point and Peale's exhumation of this prehistoric mastodon in 1801 and this reconstruction were international news. It was then considered the largest [inaudible] of which there is no description in zoology. It was only the second reconstruction of such a fossil skeleton in the world at that time, and it was at this moment that European scientists even doubted that America had prehistoric creatures.

[\(00:38:36\)](#):

So, therefore its discovery here in America was a form of international success. Yes, America could generate these historic old creatures as well as Europe. The Mastodon was reconstructed by Peale and his team, which comprised the sculptor, William Rush, Charles's son, Rembrandt Peale, who was writing a scientific pamphlet about the skeleton for its display and Moses its reconstruction was problematic,

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and they worked on its reconstruction for three months. Here's how Charles described Moses' role in this. In his autobiography, the most expert anatomist could not have found the fitting of a fracture better than those of the least knowledge as was exemplified by the fact that Moses Williams fitted pieces together by trying not the most probable but the most improbable positions as onlookers I have believed. Yet he did more good in this way than anyone among those employed in the work. This is surely a comment that appears to speak to Moses native intelligence, focus and creative thinking. However, although Moses served as an important member of the reconstruction team, he also became part of the public promotion for its initial display at Peale's Philadelphia Museum when in January 1802, Charles unveiled the mastodon in an illuminated gallery at night for the public. This special showing included an extra admission charge and was heralded by a trumpeter walking through the streets in front of Moses who was on horseback wearing a feathered costume to distribute broadside advertising the display.

[\(00:40:30\)](#):

So, this interestingly that I'm showing you up here is from a French guidebook to Philadelphia. So, it was a very famous thing if you came to Philadelphia, you wanted to see Peale's mastodon at the Peale museum. And here is a broad side on the mastodon in the aftermath of the Mastodon. Wait a minute, this is okay. In the aftermath of Mastodon as Peale's Sun, Rembrandt and Rubens went off to London, John Hawkins Physio Trace was installed in Peale's museum in December 1802, and it appears that Moses begins as the museum's cutter of profiles in 1803. As Rembrandt Peale wrote in 1857, the physio Nitra was quote long one of the attractive features of the museum under the management of the well-known Moses, he had, excuse me, Moses had acquired such dexterity and accuracy that the machine was confided to his custody with the privilege of retaining a fee for drawing and cutting.

[\(00:41:49\)](#):

In a few years. He amassed funds sufficient to buy a two-story brick house and actually married my father's white cook Moses' location in the museum noted in the museum's 1805 catalog was in the gallery area as I have indicated in the center of the main room. And it was noted that he received 8 cents for cutting out each set of profiles from such as chose to employ him. We also know that the practice of Moses was to have a half sheet of folded paper to cut out four profiles at once himself reserving the blocks. And so extensive was his business that I have seen two barrels full of these sections, which he called blockheads among which were frequently found with a careful search, the likenesses of many valued friends or relatives and sometimes of distinguished persons which created another source of income for him. Charles Willson Peale's correspondence also reveals Moses' success.

[\(00:42:54\)](#):

In July of 1803, he wrote to his son Raphaele in Norfolk, Virginia that I have just spoken to a gentleman who says he was at your room in Norfolk, which was so crowded that he could not get his profiles. Moses has made him a good one being from Carolina. He did not at first relish having it done by a mulatto. However, I convinced him that Moses could do it much better than I could. In 1804 he wrote to Hawkins that all Peale wrote to Hawkins that although demand at the museum was then slow, Moses cuts them admirably. Well, no wonder since he has had an infinite deal of practice in 1806, Peale noted that the business of the physio Nitra was not quite in demand as formally, but Moses however cuts so

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well that he still gets good wages at it. Charles also acknowledged Moses' enormous output, responsibilities and good judgment.

[\(00:43:54\)](#):

Charles had projected assembling an album of some of the enormous number of profiles cut at the museum, but he noted that it was too much for Moses to keep track and label all that he cut, but that he thought that Moses might give such names as he might think worthy of being known and remembered. In working on an album of profiles that belonged to the Peale sellers family that came as part of a large and important gift of work by the artists of the Peale family to the Philadelphia Museum of Art from Robert L. McNeil Jr. I realized that this was a collection that offered a unique opportunity to see if I could identify and evaluate a body of work that represented Moses. Excuse me, I just want to show you some of Moses' work here. We'll go back to the other slide in a minute.

[\(00:44:53\)](#):

So because of this collection included profile portraits of members of the Peale, family, friends, and relations that would logically have been created at the museum by Moses or were documented as being cut by him, I realized that this was in fact a very unique opportunity to identify characteristics that would be very specific to Moses. I asked Lauren to join me in this and I believe that in reviewing the album together, we now have a reasonably accurate picture of what a profile cut by Moses Williams looks like. This selection is particularly useful since we can identify the sitters and reasonably determine their age. And so approximately when they were cut, they are from the top Raphaelle and Rubens. Elizabeth de Pester Peale Charles's second wife who died in 1804. Charles Willson Peale in the center and Peale's third wife, Hannah Peale and the bottom row we have Coleman sellers and so Denise Ba Peale sellers who were married in 1805 of particular interest for Charles Willson Peale's perspective on how well a profile might suggest a person's character is his recollection of in his autobiography of how by chance he met his third wife, Hannah, this is Hannah, right here on a visit to the museum with her cousin Elizabeth Sellers.

[\(00:46:36\)](#):

Hannah had her profile cut by Moses who handed it to Mrs. Sellers, who then showed it to Peale. He recalled that he examined it with much attention and also the original and he then took Mrs. Sellers aside and talked to her. He thought that lady had a sweet disposition and maybe Mr. Seller, Mrs. Sellers acknowledged that he had formed a just opinion. She appeared to him as a cheerful, discreet and good-tempered woman.

[\(00:47:10\)](#):

Two years later, let me see, yeah, two years later, Peale sent profiles of himself and Hannah, which you see here to John Hawkins and wrote that the PhysioNet Trace is still in demand. We contrive to occasionally make a difference size, but the perfection of Moses cutting supports its reputation of correct likeness. I send you a profile of Mrs. Peale for a trial of your judgment of physiognotrace. My profile accompanying it is proof of the correctness of the other or it may show you whether time has made any alterations to my phys. Okay, I'm going to go back here for a minute. I'm sorry. This was out of order.

[\(00:48:00\)](#):

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Two newspaper notices located by Dean and Ellen provide an interesting glimpse of Moses, his interest and his other skills and presentation of self. They are teasers because they suggest there is more to be discovered about Moses the first of these, A newspaper notice in December, 1811 from Moses reads, the young gentleman who still returns the clarinet, which has a stained near the thumb key belonging to the subscriber, taken some days since from the Oregon loft of the museum is requested to send it back without further delay and no notice shall be taken of it. This suggests Moses may have participated in the musical performances at the Peale Museum where musicians presented programs and where Oregon had been installed, portraits of famous musicians also hung in the gallery. A decade later, a notice from 1824 reads lost or stolen on the 22nd instant, a double cased silver watch maker's name Charles Townsend. Well, Townsend was a well-known Philadelphia watchmaker and to carry such a watch was an indication of status and wealth.

[\(00:49:17\):](#)

Passing references in Peale family correspondence suggests Moses intimacy with the family. In the letter to Rembrandt on September 11th, 1808, Charles wrote of his daughter Angelica's improved health and the birth of her son and that of Raphaele also has another son he wrote, and Moses a daughter as noted by Rembrandt, Moses had acquired property and Moses' address on Sterling Alley was consistent over the years. Although he also acquired additional property by 1823, he wanted to sell some lots he had purchased and Charles noted that he had also owned money, owed money to Rubens a debt that he urged him to repay, which he did the following year at the museum in the company of other employees, Moses continued with the [inaudible] as well as special concessions for special exhibitions that he was given from time to time. In 1824, he was still sought out for challenging high quality refined work.

[\(00:50:32\):](#)

When Charles gave him the task of creating a profile after a drawing made by another profile that had been misplaced, it needed to be particularly fine since it was to be the basis for a miniature portrait Charles had commissioned, had been commissioned to paint. Among Charles Willson Peale's retirement projects was the writing of his autobiography, which he completed not long before his death in 1827. In it he wrote it has been a regular business with Moses Williams from the time he was emancipated to cut profiles in the museum and he might've been wealthy if he had always made the profitable use of his money. However, he has maintained himself and his family of children comfortably and he lives in his own house and that he has not several others is his own fault. We now know that Moses did not disappear or die after 1825 as Charles Coleman Sellers stated.

[\(00:51:36\):](#)

And others have consistently repeated. He was still alive and well in 1833 and the Silvers Philadelphia directory lists his home address as Sterling Alley and cutting profiles at the arcade, which was the location of the Peale museum after its relocation early in 1828, certainly shifts and losses that occurred in Moses life with the retirement of Charles from the museum in 1810. Although he did become re-involved in 1821 and really affected Moses and the way he carried on business. Also, the museum's transition from private ownership into a corporation. It's continual changing. Leadership caused much upheaval as well as the financial problems of the period, which seriously affected museum patronage and left the celebrated once celebrated Moses somewhat rudderless perhaps more clues to Moses later life can be found in some of the still unpublished Peale family documents. But for now, I will leave it

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here for future research and conclude by showing you more of Moses' artistry contained in the Peale Sellers profile album.

[\(00:52:59\)](#):

They, here you see two profiles up close we looked at before one of Raphaelle, the other of his brother Rubens. And I think you can see how Lauren was talking about the delicacy of the cutting, the very crisp way in which these are cut. And also, there's this ability for him to project a sense of character. When you look at Raphaelle, you sort of know from what we know of Rael, the intensity of his personality and the dynamism of him. And you see the more Rubens, the more laid back, the museum manager, the guy who was able to always figure out the numbers and move along and be sort of mellow throughout his life. You just, I begin to see these and here's selections from the Peale-Sellers family. And I hope that when we look at these as a volume of beginning to know that yes, these all come from Moses hand, these are a baseline.

[\(00:53:58\)](#):

Let us look at things in other collections. How do they compare to these? Do they manifest the same kind of delicacy of cutting? Do they have the same sense of projection of character rather than being just sort of simple, dark masks, we can begin to identify Moses' artistry to give him a body of work that is his and not guessed at and not random. So, I'm very hopeful for future studies of Moses, not only finding the odd reference here or there or more dates or different things, but also just raising his artistry to a level where it really can be respected. And here's an interesting one. This was the repeat returner patron to the museum to have his profile cut the one on the left there of a sea captain. And this was done earlier, probably before he became a naturalized citizen. He's a little more in the European mode, a little fancy dress, the other one perhaps a little later and looking a little more less fancy. And here's two more very individualized portrait likenesses, but very crisply, beautifully cut. And finally, these two, one of Captain Gill who was involved with the commerce of Philadelphia and a Peale family friend relative Martha Grub. So, with that, I conclude my thoughts on Moses Williams and look forward to us all learning more about him. Thank you very much.

Nancy [\(00:55:47\)](#):

Alright. Gosh, thank you so very much Lauren and Carol. I just can't tell you how exciting it is to feel like we have this baseline, as you called it, Carol. We can start to really figure out which portraits, which silhouettes show the traces of Moses' hand and his eye and his composition, his approach. I know there are a lot of Peale experts in the audience as well as family, friends, descendants, a lot of people who are going to be very, very interested to learn more. So, let's get started with some questions. I just want to ask one about, in fact, the comparison that you showed between the Raphaelle and Rubens Peale silhouettes, Carol, I believe the Rubens one, like the Charles Willson Peale profile has hair, also the Angelica Kaufman Peale one has kind of hair and lace that seems to be drawn on and added on. Can you talk a little bit both of you about that part of the technique? And

Carol [\(00:57:00\)](#):

It's not usual, you don't see it often, but you see it randomly every once in a while. And I think it may have been the request of the sitter, it may have been, I don't know, maybe it was to take it a, to sort of

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add a little level of realism or something. But you can go through a whole album and maybe see one or two with that. So, it's not something you see a lot of, but you see it from time to time.

Lauren ([00:57:34](#)):

I might add that you don't see it much in Peale silhouettes, ones that come from the Peale Museum, but you do see it in England, it was more common. It was more common. There was more of a painting profile tradition there.

Carol ([00:57:53](#)):

Earlier at that same timeframe or Yeah.

Lauren ([00:57:57](#)):

Yes, in the same time period. So, it's a possibility that somebody had seen it elsewhere, whether they had seen it in England itself, or somebody had brought a silhouette from England to the United States and could have requested or requested and then an experiment.

Carol ([00:58:15](#)):

Yeah, interesting.

Nancy ([00:58:17](#)):

I think that it was Moses who did that embellishment of the profile.

Lauren ([00:58:25](#)):

There's a possibility I wouldn't.

Carol ([00:58:27](#)):

Venture to say, but maybe Lauren has a better idea about it. But I don't know, it's always looked a little bit unusual to me, but then maybe I'm responding more to the sort of beautiful simplicity of the silhouette and why would you put something like that in there? But it's all perception. It's all what you want to see. So

Lauren ([00:58:55](#)):

It was not uncommon for other silhouette artists to put it in, and it depended on their taste or the client's taste, or the time involved.

Carol ([00:59:06](#)):

I think it's taste to a good extent. Yeah, or simplicity. I mean, we're looking at in the Peale Sellers album, this is a Quaker family album, and there may be a kind of bias towards simplicity within that album itself. And because it's full of people who were either friends, relatives, friends, family relatives, more distant relatives.

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Nancy ([00:59:32](#)):

Got it. Okay. Well let me.

Carol ([00:59:34](#)):

All within the same community, so to speak.

Nancy ([00:59:38](#)):

Okay, got it. Carol, I think we might occasionally have a slight delay with your audio, so apologies if we accidentally talk over you, but we'll get it all in. I do want to turn the mic over, as it were to our participants here in this program. Please do put your questions in the chat. We've got one from Lisa Crawley. Do we know where in Maryland Moses and his parents were from? Wasn't it Anne Arundel County? Given Philadelphia's noted black church community of that era, did Moses have any religious affiliation? And thanks for this presentation.

Carol ([01:00:16](#)):

I think I know I have begun to look, and I know that Dean has certainly looked, and I will tell you it is very hard. You would not necessarily think that the name Moses Williams would be proliferating. There are so many Moses Williams, white, black, whatever, that it's, you don't know who they refer to. I thought initially I had found a marriage for him, but I don't think it's going to play out in the end very difficult and finding much less in black church records and those sorts of things than we would hope. But we're beginning with a lot of this research and it's a very active, now very rich area of historical research. I know there are a number of dissertations coming out right now that are full of all sorts of wonderful material and adding a lot to this. So, I think we are going to find out, but we don't know yet.

([01:01:20](#)):

So, what those affiliations were. Also, remember that Moses is mulatto, and he was able to sort of maybe move in between different areas. He may not have had affiliations as strongly in the black community. We just don't know. We will have to see. However, I will say that Raphaelle Peale painted two black clergymen, which was a very unusual thing. Two very Hansen portraits, one of which is at the Delaware Art Museum. So, there's just so much more to be done in this area, a very rich area for people to get in there and work on. I saw in the chat that someone asked or mentioned that they had seen somewhere that Moses' family had been traded for paintings. And that is a story that has come along through the literature that Charles Willson Peale was given the Scarboroughs as a couple in payment for perhaps several family portraits that he painted for them. So that is true.

Nancy ([01:02:39](#)):

Alright, thank you for answering that question as well. And thank you for referring to Dean Krimmel, Baltimore based historian and former curator at the Peale when it was open in the 20th century. And he's been doing an enormous amount of research into Moses Williams' background and also, I think you referenced Dr. Ellen Fernandez Sako, we've all looked at, and of course, Dr. Gwendolyn Du Bois Shaw. So, shout out to all of them. They're the giant shoulders. Certainly, we at the Peale in terms of putting together the Moses Williams exhibit have been standing on, and we're really grateful for all your

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scholarship. We have another question from Steve and Monty Howard. Are there any surviving descendants of Moses that we know of? Oh, sorry. Are there any surviving descendants of Moses Williams whom we know of?

Carol ([01:03:44](#)):

No, and I know Gwendolyn in her writings, she mentions that she sort of feels that perhaps Moses' children, his daughter, which she seemed to be aware of, was someone who she just projected may have passed. So that, and he was married, at least initially, we know to a white woman so that the children, we don't really even know where to look for them or where they were connected or wanted to be connected. So, it's very hard unless someone knew, specifically knew their identity and wanted to reconnect with it. I think you're facing a particularly complex question there. I mean, as far as I know, no one has come forward to say anything, but that's, maybe other people have heard something.

Nancy ([01:04:44](#)):

Right. Well, and maybe Dr. Fernandez Sako will come up with something as she is a genealogist. And I know she's, yes,

Carol ([01:04:51](#)):

I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful.

Nancy ([01:04:53](#)):

Fingers crossed. Question for you, Lauren. The letter that Charles Willson Peale wrote about Moses referring to his lack of, sorry, that was not the question. The question for you is, what is the hardest technical element of cutting silhouettes? Sorry, I was reading the wrong text.

Lauren ([01:05:13](#)):

Well, the difference about cutting silhouettes between what Moses does and what I do as a freehand artist would be different. So, let's first focus on Moses right now. So, he was taking something that was made as a tracing around the face. Sometimes it was wildly inaccurate. And he was essentially then taking what was traced from a machine and recutting it. So, if you're talking about anatomy, whether I'm looking at a person or whether Moses could have been looking at a person, it all depends on the person. I might say the area on the face that is the most difficult would be here because there's sometimes so many angles and so many shapes. His silhouettes were so tiny, they were about that big. So, the fact that he could get scissors and do the turns, especially at angles and curves, his work was astounding how detailed he could get it. So perhaps I could say the twists and turns of facial anatomy and how he would do it so small might be a perfect answer to talk about Moses. Fascinating.

Nancy ([01:06:38](#)):

Alright, and thank you Dean for chiming in the chat. So, let's go back to that other question. I started on Charles Willson Peale's reference to Moses Williams' lack of wealth being of his own making. Is there anything else we know about that or indeed how Moses ended up his career towards the end of his life?

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Carol ([01:07:03](#)):

Well, I would just say this is sort of a projection. I mean, we know that this is a comment coming from Charles Willson Peale in his autobiography. And I think you contextualize it a little bit in terms of Charles's issues and incredible sadness over Raphaele Peale's alcoholism. And the fact that this was a brilliant artist who essentially was self-destructive because of this horrible situation he had. And there are references to Moses perhaps drinking. They're not extensive. They're little references here and there. And I think there's also their references to, oh, he's being lazy. And that came from a couple of people, but it was, I think one of the reasons I'm talking about Moses is being caught in the middle is because I think he really was, here's a talented person, here's a person who experienced success at the museum, was well known as rebrand. Peale said the well-known Moses probably had a wonderful kind of outgoing personality.

([01:08:21](#)):

And then all of a sudden, the world kind of close in on him with the demise of the museum going downhill with the movement of the museum with Charles Willson Peale retiring in 1810. He retires between 1810 and 1820 and moves to his farm Bellfield in Germantown. And I think he is this patriarchal figure, and he may have created an ambiance for Moses that once he was out of the picture on a daily basis, became more difficult. I think you have to look at Moses, these references to Moses in the context of what does one have to do? You're cutting profiles, but then that's, they're not as much in demand. You're doing other things in the museum, but that's not as exciting as cutting profiles. And so, I think there's a whole life there that is unexplored and we have these references, but I think we can't take those references and let them totally define them. Especially when you have someone who has left us a body of work that is really so beautiful. I mean, I really had no idea until I sat down, really started looking hard at this book. That was my mission to figure out what's going on, who are these people and who did this? And so, it's easy to make judgments and to project, but I think the situation is complex. And I think Moses had this complexity of being caught in a way between two worlds.

([01:10:06](#)):

But the more we learn about him, the more things may come into focus . . .

Nancy ([01:10:16](#)):

And the more we're able to do programs and exhibitions about him, hopefully the more scholarship will come through. Exactly. So, a question for you, Lauren. Were the machines used, the physiognotrace machines used just because of the volume of the demand for silhouettes? Or were they somehow helpful to the practice of the artist?

Lauren ([01:10:40](#)):

Are you talking about in general or specifically the Peale museum?

Nancy ([01:10:45](#)):

Oh, I guess both.

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Lauren ([01:10:48](#)):

Well, if you want to just talk about, so let's take the Peale separately. I'm just talking about physio trace machines. During this era, the machines allowed people who weren't artists to be able to make money to make profiles. So, it was becoming very popular to have something that the common people could buy before the revolution. Before, when we had more strata in society, I mean, excuse me, more definition between the top and the bottom, people didn't have portraits made because they were still struggling to make a country to make their way in the world. And then after we formed a country, people were starting to have the possibility to have their own unique identity as Americans. People started branching out, doing more things, making more money. That's where people who weren't artists were allowed to take a machine and go try to make money doing it.

([01:11:55](#)):

So, it gave people who didn't know how to do it by hand a way to do it. And as for the physiognotrace at the Peale Museum, I think that Charles Willson Peale so much believed in reading personality by the face. He probably suggested or required, we don't know whether all profiles needed to be done. Certainly, Moses had enough talent to be able to probably look, he was so much recutting what the profile machine was making. He was almost cutting it freehand anyway, but it was probably required to just use the machine anyway, and he wound up there. One of the questions was how many people their profiles had cut at the Philadelphia Museum over the years, and it was probably over 250,000. I have calculated that it could be up to 270,000. What we don't know is how many actual silhouettes were cut. And we do know that there was a slowdown in some years. So somewhere between 250,000, a quarter of a million and upwards silhouettes were made at the, excuse me, people. And we don't know how many silhouettes that cuts. Wow. So then, go ahead.

Carol ([01:13:25](#)):

Yeah. Interject another thing, Nancy, about the silhouettes that when 1803 when the silhouette, the Physio Trace goes into the museum, there had already been St. Mein and the French Emigres artists come to the US and were very popular cutting profiles for the elite and producing a very beautiful kind of presentation, large scale profiles. Lauren made a bit of a reference to that in her talk. And so, it began as a kind of upscale thing, a beautiful cut profile that was then engraved. And so, there was a place for the Pealed profiles closer for every man to jump off from. So, there was already a kind of vogue for profiles in Maryland, in Pennsylvania where these artists were active, and it was like it.

([01:14:38](#)):

Would be sort of fancy and wonderful to have it. Also, the whole idea of the museum and community and things to do this was an exciting new thing to go to the museum. And then there was the profile to be cut like the graduating class from Penn. This group of guys got together and went to the Peale Museum, and all had their profiles cut and then traded profiles so that they had a memory of something for each other to give each other at that moment of their graduation. So, it was a very social art too that I think we want to remember that it had a dynamic just not closed in but reaching out and a way for families to begin to document their families through these albums and through exchange.

Nancy ([01:15:27](#)):

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Very interesting. We have another question from Susan Law. Are the portraits always identified by name? And if so, are the names published where a genealogist can find and see them?

Lauren ([01:15:41](#)):

I'm working.

Carol ([01:15:45](#)):

On that now with the Peale Sellers book, and it's difficult. Some of them have been identified, but it's only if someone chose to identify it. We have 172 profiles in our album, and we have 50 that are unidentified. Others have been bitten written into. Sometimes these may not be correct because as Lauren pointed out with the Moses Williams profile unknown profile, that was probably a later edition of that inscription of Moses Williams, someone who knew that that was him. So sometimes these things happened in the late 19th century, the early 20th century, when people were looking back at these albums and saying, oh, that's so and so, or they came across another reference, and they could annotate it. So, it's challenging.

Lauren ([01:16:41](#)):

I might be able to also add to that, Susan, if you're talking about only Peale silhouettes or many silhouettes, a lot of albums have been identified and they are in different museums. So, if you're looking to see genealogical personages that are in silhouettes, you might be able to do a search for the name to see it. I have seen, for instance, at Colonial Williamsburg's Collections and definitely at the Smithsonian, William Base silhouettes, they have been identifying people in silhouettes in their collection. And I know that the silhouettes over at Colonial Williamsburg are definitely over 1500, and there are more than that. And then there are many collections that're still looking at everything, just like what Carol said. So yes, you can find Genealogical.

Carol ([01:17:41](#)):

Library company. Lauren, like with talked about library companies in Philadelphia has a large album, and a lot of those have identification because of how they were given such and such family gave them.

Lauren ([01:17:57](#)):

So, you might look for sitter.

Carol ([01:17:59](#)):

So sometimes you can be very lucky. Yeah, don't give up hope.

Nancy ([01:18:09](#)):

Great. I just want to check in with Travis. How much longer are you able to stay with us?

Travis ([01:18:17](#)):

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I can keep going.

Nancy ([01:18:20](#)):

Okay, great. So as if on Q, we've got a nice message in the chat from Dean Rimmel, a word on profile cutters as competition for Moses Williams, Dean searched every available city directory between 1,818 40 for profile cutters using the word profile. The word silhouette was not yet in use, nor did it appear in the directories. In 1805, Anthony Blanc was listed as a profile painter at 2 21 South second Street. He was not listed after that. Moses Williams was the only person identified as a profile cutter between 1813 and 1830. When someone named Zero Kirk was listed as the profile cut carpenter in P Road, that was the only listing for Kirk as such, in 18 18 33, which was the last listing for Moses Williams, another solitary listing appeared for a profile cutter named John King living on Beck's Alley. There are no listings for profile in subsequent PCDs for 1835 to 36, 18, 37, 39, 40, 45, and 50. He also tried silhouette in the 1840s but found nothing. Do you want to comment on that?

Carol ([01:19:39](#)):

There were profile cutters at Appeals Museum that Charles Coleman Sellers mentions two women, one named Megs, M-E-I-G-S, and the other I don't recall off hand, but I tried to find them in Philadelphia, various things, and I can't find either of them as of yet. And I don't know exactly when they would have what years exactly, they might have been active in or if they were active in Philadelphia in a larger context, or they just came to the Peale museum and helped out in between.

Nancy ([01:20:16](#)):

Well, I know that there are, oh, okay, great. Yeah, Dr. [inaudible] has mentioned there was the itinerant Martha and Honeywell who performed at Peale's Museum, and I think she appears in Joan Aleshire's historical novel about Charles Willson Peale and the family called Bellfield. And I think that Joan is with us. I also see Glenn Musco from Drexel University. They've done an enormous amount of research into Moses Williams in the Early Peale Philadelphia Museum. And Dr. Doreen Bulger is with us, also a Peale scholar. So, I do encourage everyone, since Travis does not have any, and our speakers do not have any time constraints, please chime in because this is a conversation that needs to be broadened. And if we can start it today, we can absolutely find other time to follow up with all of these experts in future as well.

Lauren ([01:21:22](#)):

Just to add a little bit, Dean, sometimes the word likeness is used as a substitute for, they might not say profile cutter, but they might say likeness artists. I have seen many substitutions for different names. So sometimes profile likeness instead of profile cutter, you might find just in case I have seen likeness where it substituted.

Nancy ([01:22:00](#)):

So, lots of kudos for this talk, and I think we did have a couple of other questions earlier in the chat. Let me go back and try to grab them.

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Lauren ([01:22:12](#)):

Go ahead. So KRA is actually from Winter tour, so I'm honored that she's come. Thank you, KRA.

Nancy ([01:22:23](#)):

And we had a question earlier from one of my colleagues, any indication of what the Sterling Alley House was like? I'm going to ask Dean Krimmel to help jog my memory, but I was his assistant doing a bit of research in the Philadelphia archives, and I know that Dr. Gwendolyn Du Bois Shaw described it as a two story brick house, but I think we found the deed of sale for that, and at least at that time, it seems to have been a wooden house. Is that right, Dean, or does anybody have anything? No,

Carol ([01:23:01](#)):

I think there was probably, that's both. That's true. And both those things are probably true. I think the description of the Brick House, which was from Rembrandt Peale, I think that was probably his reference that I think I may have read. So there probably was that also Moses owned a lot of real estate because he made quite a bit of money. He invested in real estate, but over the years he ended up selling it and having to sell it and so forth. So, he probably owned a lot of different houses of different shapes and different materials, or some empty lots we know he owned. So, I think both may be true. He may have ended up at the Sterling Alley House, may have been a clock board house, and he may have started out when he was first married with the two-floor brick house. I think it may all be.

Nancy ([01:24:00](#)):

Makes sense. I remember Dean saying this was at a time when very few people, black or white, owned their own homes. So yeah, he's put in the chat that a two-story frame house on a 14 by 36-foot lot in 1812. He paid \$875, which was a lot of money back then. Yeah. All right. And absolutely, yes, Shirley Muney. It could have been a building whose materials were transformed over time, or as Carol suggested, multiple buildings being referenced here. All right. There was one, I guess one other thing I wanted to bring up. I don't know if either of you wants to speak about it, perhaps Lauren, you have some insight. As a silhouette artist, Dr. Allen Fernandez Sako has hypothesized that the portrait by Rembrandt Peale of the Hawaiian chieftain, so a man of color wearing the regalia of a Hawaiian chieftain, which was in the collection of Peale's Philadelphia Museum, that the sitter for that portrait could have been Moses Williams. As you both described, whenever Charles Willson Peale needed a person of color for a marketing campaign, Moses Williams was drafted in to portray Native Americans and potentially this Hawaiian chieftain as well. Do you have any insight into that, and are there any clues from looking at that portrait and comparing it to say the profile of Moses Williams that might confirm or deny? And I think this is something that the folks at Drexel working with Dr. Mochi have been looking at as well. So please do chime in.

Carol ([01:25:59](#)):

Are you asking me or Lauren or both of us?

Nancy ([01:26:02](#)):

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Both of you. Yeah, anybody. And we've actually already got a little bit of, it's

Carol ([01:26:05](#)):

A beautiful portrait, remember I Peale portrait? Yeah, it's beautiful. And it could be Moses, what do you think, Lauren?

Lauren ([01:26:12](#)):

It's a possibility. And I'm looking at what Glen [inaudible] is saying that this is the first time that I've heard about the 3D model of what Moses could have looked like. It's definitely possible that it was the same person based on that profile. And then painting is definitely a possibility.

Nancy ([01:26:37](#)):

I'm just going to; I think I can show that image here quickly. Let's see here. Yeah, I will just share it so everyone could.

Carol ([01:26:54](#)):

To think it was him. It's a very handsome guy.

Nancy ([01:27:00](#)):

Let's see if I can just get to the right. Let's see. Oh yeah, there we go. Okay, so this is just quickly pulled up through a Google search, but we have a reproduction of this painting hanging in the Moses Williams exhibit at the Peale now, so you can come and see for yourself. I do know that the original is in the Bishop Museum. I

Carol ([01:27:28](#)):

Think though I recently came across something where I think that date may be not correct for that headgear, because I think I found something about when that entered the museum collection. So, I'll have to go back and look at that. I mean, it wouldn't make any difference in terms of whether Moses is wearing this or not. It would just give it a different date. That's all.

Nancy ([01:27:53](#)):

Oh, interesting. Yeah, the original, as I'm sure you know, is in the collection of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. And anecdotally, I've been told that it's never put on display there because any Hawaiian will tell you that this man is no Hawaiian. That would, there you go. The idea that someone of color, perhaps Moses Williams was the actual model for this, but not an actual Hawaiian chieftain.

Carol ([01:28:25](#)):

Well, we don't have any reference to a Hawaiian chieftain visiting the museum. And you think that would've been incredibly noteworthy and popped up somewhere in the literature. Although you don't

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know, there's an awful lot of Peale literature that hasn't been published. So, Peale correspondence and stuff that's still out there to be published. So, who knows?

Nancy ([01:28:49](#)):

And speaking of chieftains, there's something that Dirk Joseph, the Baltimore based cranky artist, and that's not a slur. He is a very and kind and man, and not rude at all, but cranky is a very particular art form. It's kind of analog cinema and very appropriate for telling the story of Moses Williams because of course, Charles Willson Peale and his family were involved in some of the first experiments with moving imagery in Philadelphia. And anyway, this contemporary art form still uses kind of a scroll that slides and puppetry and live music and dialogue and performance to, in this case, tell the story of Moses Williams' life. And one of the scenes that he mentioned in the first version of this performance, which we got to see yesterday at the Association of African American Museums Conference, indicates that at some point, and I had read this as well, there were several indigenous leaders who came to Philadelphia. They had been in DC meeting with then President Jefferson, and they came to the Philadelphia Museum. Charles Willson Peale was very proud, I believe, of having hosted them. But do you know if the silhouettes were cut of these chieftains, and if so, where those are and who cut them,

Carol ([01:30:22](#)):

I'm sorry, it was broken up. I didn't hear. Who were the people,

Nancy ([01:30:27](#)):

These indigenous leaders who had been, oh,

Carol ([01:30:31](#)):

Aren't they at the Smithsonian or something, or Monticello? Smithsonian. Monticello, yeah.

Nancy ([01:30:38](#)):

So, do we think that Moses Williams cut those profiles?

Carol ([01:30:44](#)):

Maybe? Yes. Lauren and I were only looking at them the other day. Right. We were, well, the thing is, there also could be by Raphaëlle, but if they were done in Philadelphia, they're more likely to be Moses. If they were done somewhere else, they might be Raphaëlle because he was itinerant. But again, the same sort of definitions that Lauren and I have suggested for what his work looks like. It seems that they might well be by Moses. They're really very handsome delineations.

Nancy ([01:31:28](#)):

That's really exciting.

Carol ([01:31:30](#)):

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Yeah. Well, actually it is, isn't it? Yeah,

Nancy ([01:31:33](#)):

Really is. I just want to voice also another note from Dr. CIO from Drexel that Tyrone Bullock, who made the 3D model of Moses, matched up the silhouette of Moses with the profile of the painting and felt like that was a pretty good match. So, another strong clue, and it is wonderful, I have to say, look at that portrait and think, yeah, maybe I'm actually looking at the man in some way. So, it is one 30 now. I think this might be a good moment for us to wrap up the last call for questions or comments.

([01:32:20](#)):

I will also invite everyone who's interested in continuing this conversation to reach out to us at the Peale. Hopefully this is just the beginning. We'll be able to convene more conversations of this nature and support the research of more scholars and artists interested in the work of Moses Williams. Thank you so much, Lauren and Carol. That was just fabulous. Such a treat. And I do hope everybody will come check out the new Moses Williams exhibit at the Peale in Baltimore, as well as the exhibition called Founding Fossils, which has just opened at the Peale. It was co-curated by archeologist, Dr. Cheryl Fogel Hatch. And Dr. Bernard means from Virginia Commonwealth University with lots of collaboration from Dr. Means students there. And that exhibition is about mastodon and the fossils that the Peales and the founding fathers studied and collected and were very enthusiastic about. And of course, Moses Williams' role in assembling the Mastodon skeleton is part of that story.

([01:33:32](#)):

And if you're in the Baltimore region, please join us tomorrow from 10 to four at the Peale for our 210th birthday party. And you'll get to see Dirk Joseph perform his cranky telling the story of Moses Williams. And if you've never heard of Cranky before or if you'd like to RSVP, I believe my colleagues are putting the links in the chat there, do check out our website, Peale.org for info on upcoming programs and to join our mailing list. And we do rely on your donations to continue work like this. So please consider making a contribution to our Labor Day Challenge if you enjoyed this program, and we hope to see you again soon. Thank you so much.