

SUMPTER PRIDDY III, INC.

323 SOUTH WASHINGTON STREET • ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314



SC2015001. *Portrait Bust of Kentucky statesman Henry Clay (1777-1852).*

Attributed to Ferdinand Friedrich August Pettrich (German/American, 1798-1872). Washington, D.C. ca. 1842. Cast iron with a patinated bronze finish. H: 22 ¼" x W: 14 ½" x D: 9 ½"

ARTIST: Pettrich was born in Dresden, December 3, 1798, the son of sculptor Franz Pettrich (1770-1844) who worked in Rome under the direction of Antonio Canova. Ferdinand attended the *l'école des Beaux-Arts* in Dresden in 1816. In 1817 Pettrich goes to Rome and works in his father's atelier and then with Bertel Thorvaldsen.¹ Ferdinand marries in Rome and has two sons, Oscar (1831-1873) and August (1832-1908) and in 1835 Ferdinand and his family arrived in Philadelphia.²

¹ Benezit, E. *Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs*. Librairie Grun, 1953, Vol 6, p. 632.

² After his return from Brazil, Pope Pio IX provides Pettrich with a studio and produces several sculptures: images of Christ, and the statues of Justice and Peace at St. Mary of the Angels in Rome.

PETTRICH IN WASHINGTON CITY *U.S. Treasury, 1500 Pennsylvania Avenue*

Having befriended Pettrich in the 1830s, the American architect Robert Mills (1781 – 1855) commissioned Pettrich to produce mantels for the new United States Treasury building in Washington in 1838. According to NAME, Pettrich “discovered in the neighborhood of Washington, a clay possessing uncommon properties of hardening and capable of being moulded [sic] into classic forms, as well as ornamental with designs similar to the ancient Etruscan Vases [sic].”³ By January 1839, Pettrich had completed twelve mantels of which nine survive today – though curiously, not made of clay but rather instead cast iron (Figure X).⁴ Decorated with repeating motifs of caryatids and anthemions, the design of the austere mantels derive from recent discoveries in Etruscan pottery as popularized by contemporary publications such as a book of vases by the Italian archaeologist and antiquarian Giuseppe Micali (1769 – 1844) published in 1832.⁵

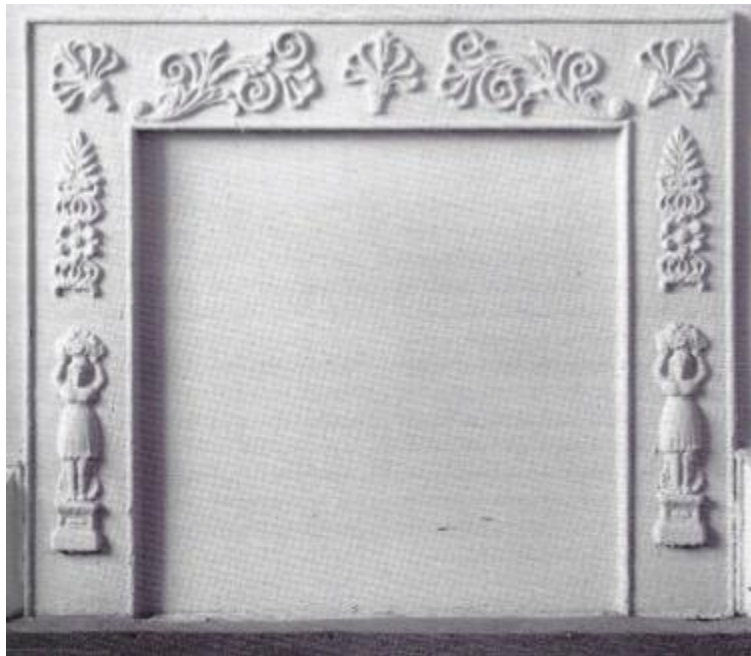


Figure X. Mantel with Etruscan decoration. Designed by Robert Mills with Ferdinand Pettrich and cast by Pettrich. Probably made in Washington DC, 1839. Cast iron. Dimensions not available.

As published in Pamela Scott, *Fortress*

of Finance (2010), p. 88, pl. II-18.

³ “Pettrich the Sculptor” *National Intelligencer*, April 25, 1836. As quoted in Pamela Scott, *Fortress of Finance: The United States Treasury Building* (Washington, DC: Treasury Historical Association, 2010), 85. Mills originally projected the building required about 100 marble mantels, each costing between \$20-\$25, so the German artist’s promise to reduce spending by twenty to fifty percent was undoubtedly appealing to the architect and the building superintendents.

⁴ Correspondence with Curator Richard Cote, Office of the Curator at the U.S. Treasury Department in December 14, 2015 confirmed the original mantels were painted iron and not a clay composite, as previously published. See for example, Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee, *Buildings of the District of Columbia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 155. Research for Scott’s more recent book *Fortress of Finance* (2010) confirmed the mantels are cast iron.

⁵ For more on Micali, see Richard Daniel De Puma, *Etruscan Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 126-127.

Between the fall of 1837 and the following spring, Pettrich carved the sandstone Ionic capitals destined for the East Wing fronting 15th Street, sculpting each capital for \$100. His studio produced two finished capitals a month, rough-cutting one while finishing two others (Figure X).⁶ Mills had long envisioned a grand colonnade to the Treasury, believing such an architectural expression would boldly manifest the significance of the Treasury Department to American society and justly situated the new building among the existing classical structures throughout the city such as the nearby President's House, which also featured Ionic capitals. Today the imposing 466-ft. uninterrupted colonnade is an iconic vista in Washington DC and an important legacy of Pettrich's collaboration with Robert Mills and the sculptor's accomplishments in the capital (Figure X).



Figure X (Left): Only two of the original painted limestone capitals by Ferdinand Pettrich survive at Pioneer Park Nature Center in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Figure X (Below): The U.S. Treasury East Wing colonnade features 30 Ionic capitals. Photograph by architectural historian Calder Loth, 2011.



⁶ As cited in Scott, *Fortress of Finance*, 88. In 1908, granite replicas replaced the original painted sandstone capitals designed by Mill's and Pettrich's for the East colonnade. Today, four are preserved in Pioneer Park Nature Center in Lincoln, Nebraska. See Society of Architectural Historians, "Treasury Building" *SAHArchipedia*. Available online. Accessed December 3, 2015; "Portions of Historic Treasury Building in Lincoln, Nebraska" *Treasury Historical Association Newsletter* (August 2003): 1.

Portrait Busts of Henry Clay

In a June 1838 letter to Washington socialite Margaret Bayard Smith (1778-1884), Clay expresses his satisfaction with an earlier portrait bust by Pettrich:

I share with you in all your sympathies with Mr. Pettrich, and your wishes that I should sit again to him shall have the most friendly consideration. If his were the single application, I should have no difficulty, but I have already sat to two artists, and I have been obliged to refuse many others.

The bust which has been already taken of me by Mr. P. has been recently very much praised for its fidelity. I wished to see it again and will take some early opportunity to do so. If it would answer a further sitting would be unnecessary, and I should be able to economise [sic] my time at a period when I very much need it all. If it be condemned I will try and sit to him again at this or the next Session.

This likeness is undoubtedly a plaster bust now among the collections of the Smithsonian _____ (Figure 6). It seems probable Clay did indeed find time for a second sitting with Pettrich, a commission that may have ultimately produced the design for the iron bust herein cast four years later in 1842.



Figure 6: *Henry Clay*. Painted plaster, 1838. H: 27". As illustrated in Hans Geller, *Franz & Ferdinand Pettrich: Two Saxon Sculptors from the Period of Classicism* (Dresden, Germany: Wolfgang Jess, 1955), pl. 66, p. 128. According to the author, this plaster bust showcases the artist's vitality, technical skill, and considers the likeness to be "almost more impressive and artistically mature" than Pettrich's marble sculptures from the 1840s.⁷

⁷ Hans Geller, *Franz & Ferdinand Pettrich: Two Saxon Sculptors from the Period of Classicism* (Dresden, Germany: Wolfgang Jess, 1955), 126-128.

A second virtually identical iron bust of Clay sheds further light on Pettrich's techniques and his modeling of the southern statesman (Figure 1). Recently auctioned by Case Antiques of Knoxville, Tennessee, in January 2016, the similarities between the two busts in craftsmanship, proportion and deft rendition of Clay's facial features are remarkable—from the artist's treatment of Clay's wrinkled brow and wide forehead to the subtle details of the politician's hair.⁸ Beyond the physical similarities, plaster fills the internal voids of both busts.



Figure 1. A comparison of the *Bust of Henry Clay*, Lot 209 recently auctioned January 2016 by Case Antiques (left), shows many similarities to the Clay bust offered herein (right). The original patinated bronzed surface applied to the Case Antiques bust no longer survives, revealing a lightly pitted and heavily oxidized appearance compared to the surface of the present example. Image Courtesy Case Antiques.

Crucially, the Case Antiques bust retains a signatory plaque attached to the reverse at the nape of Clay's neck, which states "HENRY CLAY / MADE BY / FERDINAND PETTRICH / 1842" (Figures 2 and 3). The heavily oxidized surface of the label suggests it

⁸ Lot 209 *Bust of Henry Clay*. Winter Fine Art & Antiques Auction. Case Antiques, Auctions & Appraisals, Knoxville, Tennessee. January 23, 2016. Realized \$10,836.00 (including buyer's premium).

is likely original to the bust's completion, and may represent a label Pettrich himself applied. Unfortunately, this important detail no longer survives on the bust herein, though it undoubtedly once exhibited a similar feature.



Figures 2 & 3: The rectangular cast iron plaque bears the stamped inscription:

HENRY CLAY
MADE BY
FERDINAND PETTRICH
1842

Figures 4 & 5: An irregularly shaped circular depression in the same location appears on the reverse this bust (Figure 1). Larger circular impressions to the left and right and smaller divits above and below suggest the placement of the label, which thus would have concealed the unfinished edges of the hole.



A number of similar characteristics seen in the pair of Clay sculptures described above suggest Pettrich also created a striking bust of Clay's contemporary, U.S. Senator John C. Calhoun (1782-1850) of South Carolina. Presently exhibited in the politician's home "Fort Hill" preserved as a historic house museum by Clemson University, the iron bust reveals similar casting techniques to those observed on the Clay examples.⁹ Like Clay, Calhoun stares confidently towards the viewer. Deeply-set eyes beneath a heavy brow and gaunt cheeks define his passionate persona. On the reverse, a cylindrical socle or post – very similar in shape to that used on the Clay examples – supports Calhoun's visage.

Figure 6: *Portrait Bust of John C. Calhoun.* Attri. to Ferdinand August Pettrich (1798 – 1872), previously attri. to sculptor and founder Clark Mills (American, 1810-1883), ca. 1825-50. Cast iron with patinated bronze finish. Dimensions not available. *Courtesy, Fort Hill, the John C. Calhoun Mansion and Library at Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina.*

⁹ Correspondence with William Hiott, Curator at Fort Hill, and Sumpter Priddy, March 22, 2016.

According to Hiott, curatorial records at Fort Hill have long attributed to the iron bust to the American sculptor and founder Clark Mills (1810-1883) who cast a plaster bust of Calhoun in 1844-45, now in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. A comparison of the plaster bust with iron example presented here shows significant differences thus discounting Mills as the design source for the iron bust. In the 1840s, Mills developed a method of taking life masks from his subjects to simplify the production of portrait busts. The iron bust was donated to Clemson in ____.

CONDITION: The bust is in overall very good condition. The sculpture has an even wear throughout the original bronze finish commensurate with its age and presents some of the original luster.

The bust poses no immediate concern for conservation to preserve its structural integrity. However, a minor visible loss of the finish on the nose of the sitter and early stages of flaking of bronze finish is apparent on reverse side of the base that may require attention to protect it from further deterioration.