

Charles-Gabriel Sauvage, Louis XVI and Franklin. Bisque porcelain.

This piece is an original sculpture, and one of only six pieces ever made under the supervision of the original artist, the famous French sculptor Charles Gabriel Sauvage [1741–1827], also known as Lemire, from the Niderviller Ceramics factory in Lorraine France. This sculpture depicts Benjamin Franklin [1706-1790] and King Louis XVI's [1754-1793] signing the treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States and France. It currently is on display in the Philbrick Rare Book Room.

The donor, William Anthony Hoppin [1844-1915]¹ the son of notable New England Judge, Francis Edwin Hoppin was the Treasurer and Executive Officer of the Providence Institution for Savings.² He was known for his frequent trips to Europe, and had a particular interest in European culture and History. He donated the piece in 1915³, having been given the piece by his uncle William Jones Hoppin [1813-1895]. William Hoppin was a lawyer, diplomat and writer, who received a LL.B. degree from Harvard University in 1835. He became first secretary of the American legation in London, serving from 1876-1886 during the ministry of James Russell Lowell. He was also a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art for three years, which also has a copy of this sculpture.⁴

The subject matter of the piece depicts a very important moment in American and French history. The terms of Treaty of Amity and Commerce reached between France and the United States in 1788 allowed America to trade freely without the risk of British interference. France would ensure the safety of American commercial vessels vulnerable to British attacks in open water. International, as well as domestic, and diplomacy, are closely tied with the history of Providence as a trade-based economy relying heavily on port based means of importing and exporting goods. Franklin was well respected as a diplomat, and his success in helping to strengthen America's future is key as it laid the foundations for New England trade economies to develop on.

This piece of art is one of the most traveled pieces in the Athenaeum's entire art collection. It has been loaned to various museums worldwide for its important historical narrative, and beautiful replicated classical style.⁵ The idealized facial

¹ "William Anthony Hoppin." Ancestry.com.

http://www.ancestry.com/genealogy/records/william-anthony-hoppin_34418091.

² J.H. Beers & Co. Volume 1, Part 1 of Representative Men and Old Families of Rhode Island: Genealogical Records and Historical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens and of Many of the Old Families.

³ Providence Athenaeum. Annual Report, Issue 80. 1915.

⁴ Hoppin, William J. (William Jones), 1813-1895. William Jones Hoppin papers, 1833-1890: Guide.

⁵ Lancaster, Jane. Inquire Within: A Social History of the Providence Athenaeum since 1753. Providence, RI: Providence Athenaeum, 2003. p7.

features of Louis XVI, and his fairly dynamic, yet balanced posture is reminiscent of classical sculpture. The flowing cloaks, and the folds in the fabric are very realistically, and meticulously fashioned as well. It was most notably lent to a traveling exhibition in 1976, called "The European Vision of America" where it was viewed by hundreds of thousands of viewers in America, as well as France. It visited France again to be featured in a popular television series.

The style, and strategic design of the statue, effectively represents Franklin, and Louis XVI as respectably comparable political figures. Franklin is only just lower than Louis XVI in the piece, which makes sense given the terms of the agreement. France was ensuring protection to American trade ships with their own navy, which explains why Franklin is seen in a lower position, in a less powerful stance. This is also reinforced in how the two subjects are dressed, with Louis XVI donning a half suit of armor, The pivotal moment captured in this piece of sculpture is important not just because it features Franklin, but because this moment helped to define the United States as being economically independent.
