

HISTORIC STATEMENT

Mr. Christy's conception for his painting was that of combining the historical aspect of the Constitution with the symbolic. The historical aspect he has portrayed at the moment when the Constitution became a reality--he has caught the signers in the act of signing on September 17, 1787. The symbolic aspect has been achieved through the portrayal of figures representing the elements embodied in the preamble.

Like the framing of the Constitution itself, the work of painting was a matter of slow development and the maturing of the original conception. Long before Mr. Christy began the painting, he conceived the idea and made an elaborate study of many actual figures and designs to be used. He visited Independence Hall in Philadelphia in September, near the 17th, and painted a small preliminary painting of the room in which the Constitution was signed. This enabled him to know the room intimately, to catch its atmosphere, to learn the exact way that lights and shadows fall during the month of September so that he could reproduce the same with fidelity. He had the opportunity to examine the chair which George Washington used as President of the Convention, the desks, inkwells, and other pieces of furniture that are still preserved.

The next study was that of the signers themselves. He made a careful examination of the clothing of the various signers and of their habiliments. Then he studied the available portraits of each of the signers.

The historical part of the painting, as has been said before, portrays the signing. Before a close examination is made, the most prominent of the signers press themselves into notice. Thus we are struck by the figures of Washington, Franklin, and Madison as the three most prominent. Then we see, only slightly less prominent, such figures as Hamilton, Gouverneur Morris, Robert Morris, Wilson, and Clymer. Detailed examination reveals each one of the 38 signers who were present and in addition, William Jackson, the Secretary. On a dais are three figures: George Washington, Richard Dobbs Spaight, and William Blount. In the center foreground sits the sage of the Convention, Benjamin Franklin. The portrait of Franklin is undoubtedly the finest that has ever been painted. Dressed in the height of fashion, his 81 years carried jauntily, he sits gravely quiet.

The man who justly is known as the Father of the Constitution, James Madison, is sitting in the left foreground, his head turned to catch a question that is being asked him by George Clymer. Gouverneur Morris, with his wooden leg, is seen standing behind Franklin, and Robert Morris, obviously the financier, is seated with the Pennsylvania delegation on the left, and James Wilson is near him in animated conversation.

One by one, each of the deputies can be studied, his clothing and expression and attitude all typifying what is known of these men who framed the Constitution.