

Roy Meachum



1-18-88 Dirty wash

Another Monday brings several items to hang out on the line; each could fill up a column by itself, but let me get off these quick thoughts.

PEALE PAINTING: First, let me make clear, the three gentlemen who panicked away Frederick's single most valuable cultural treasure have no say in the operation of the C. Burr Artz Library.

A separate board handles that authority: a fact for which we can all be grateful. Otherwise, books could be removed on the grounds that not all readers wash their hands before turning pages.

The annointed trio reacted, as expected, to the public outcry by hunkering down behind a stonewall, politely but firmly declaring how they decided the Peale masterpiece's fate was nobody's business but their own. In the process, they whistled up support from others who subscribe to their elitist views.

In a meeting with one public official, the trio announced they had received encouragment from "90 percent" of those who had contacted them. In Friday's News-Post's Letters to the Editor column, an alderwoman and an art teacher added their voices to the side of the trustees.

However, it is not true, as one letter said, that the painting can be returned to Frederick at "anytime." The trustees have taken the position the painting will stay in Baltimore until at least 1990, fulfilling the full term of their agreement with the museum.

Nor is it the case, as the other letter writer put it, that this community was unwilling or unable to provide proper security and protection for the painting, while maintaining its Frederick home. In simple fact, no local government, group or individual was allowed the opportunity to "save" the treasure.

I can understand their alarm when the three gentlemen "discovered" their trusteeship encompassed a \$1.5 million treasure. However, the fact that the painting possessed great value was never a mystery. More than 50 years ago, I am told, it was understood that, as an historical artifact, it simply could not be replaced.

Upon receiving the expert's evaluation of the painting, the trio acted properly, if belatedly, in removing the work from its exposed position. But, at that point, they should have shared their "good news" with the community, at

least its leadership. But instead, they panicked, as I said, and invoked a pact of silence among themselves. The shameful compact to get the Peale out of Frederick followed.

Men of lesser local lineage, such as this columnist, would have become the target of expulsion for depriving the community of a prime cultural heritage. In that case, the trio would have been, certainly, in the forefront of the movement. Because they are who they are, gentlemen of impeccable Frederick credentials, endorsed by their churches for their present posts, their friends have rallied around, supplemented by more experts who have come forth.

But it was wrong, gentlemen, wrong, to cast doubts on the desire and means available from your fellow citizens to help you meet your newly perceived burden of responsibility. You arrogated unto yourselves an authority that violated the spirit, if not the letter, of your trust. Malfeasance is the word which comes to mind.

No, I did not expect resignations to follow last Monday's column. I'm sure the trio received remonstrances encouraging them to stand standfast.

'You arrogated unto yourselves an authority that violated the spirit, if not the letter, of your trust.'

How many? We'll neverknow "90 percent" of what.

But I have a proposition for the community. I suggest that the Frederick Arts Council and the Frederick Historical Society, perhaps aided by the school board and the teachers union, draw up a petition to be signed by every man, woman and child who wants the painting returned to the county. Then, a date should be selected, perhaps February's Presidents' Holiday, for a demonstration when people could show by their presence their desire to have

the painting back in Frederick. At that time, the petition could be formally presented for delivery to the trio.

In the meantime, I urge the county commissioners to refuse the trustees' offer of a duplicate to hang in the masterpiece's former place. To accept a substitute, when they were not consulted before the masterpiece's removal, would make the commissioners accomplices after the fact.

For the removal of the Peale painting was a crime, if not against the law, then in its offense on this community's sense of self-worth.

CARROLL CREEK: According to Frederick mayor Ron Young, his Carroll Creek Commission suffers both from the lack of attendance by appointees and two major resignations. Architect Tim Crosby stepped down recently, joining civic leader and major downtown property owner Margaret Kline, whose August resignation was not divulged until last week.

Given the project's importance, it is possible to wonder why Mr. Young has not moved to replace inattentive members. Why did Mrs. Kline's resignation take so long to come out?

Without expanding the panel's numbers, the mayor has a golden opportunity to help the county commissioners to rally support for their efforts to provide full funding for the project. Naming a few non-city residents would demonstrate Mr. Young's willingness to share some authority, as well as the cost, with county leaders.

When broached on the possibility of appointing anyone from outside Frederick, the mayor alibied that people who live in the city are also residents of the county.

In my view, that's substituting sophistry for common sense, particularly when, by his own admission, Mr. Young's city-only panel has displayed such a general lack of enthusiasm for the project's responsibility.

FENCE: Permeating the public speculation over the fence in our front yard seems to be a current that holds "Roy Meachum was trying to pull something over." If I were that stupid, Sharon would shoot me down on the spot. Let's face it, that kind of dumbness would have prevented the red-headed Quaker from marrying me in the first place. And anyone who thinks I run roughshod over my wife has never read a word I wrote. My name is not Gary Hart.