



THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI RESEARCH CENTER-KANSAS CITY

K0470

George Caleb Bingham (1811-1879) Papers

[Native Sons Archives]

1873

One folder

Last will and testament (November 28, 1873) for Bingham, noted Missouri artist. Also stereo view photograph of Bingham's studio over Shannon's store at Third and Main Streets, Kansas City, MO.

BIOGRAPHY:

George C. Bingham was born to Henry Vest and Mary Amend Bingham on March 20, 1811 in Virginia. The family, moved to the Missouri Territory in 1818 where Henry Bingham opened a tavern and started a cigar factory in Franklin. Financial setbacks and Henry Bingham's death in December 1823 left his wife and children in debt. In response, Mary Bingham founded the first female academy west of the Mississippi River. When Franklin flooded in 1825, Mary moved her family to a farm in Saline County, near present-day Arrow Rock.

As he grew older, George pursued various occupations moving around 1828 to Boonville. Apprenticed to a cabinetmaker George met an itinerant portrait painter and determined to pursue a career as an artist. Self-taught he began painting portraits in 1833. In April 1836, he married Sarah Elizabeth Hutchison, of Boonville with whom he fathered four children; only one of whom survived him.

In 1837, Bingham began traveling to paint portraits. When he returned to Missouri he became politically active, attended the 1840 Whig convention in Rocheport. Seizing an opportunity to paint influential political figures, in 1841 Bingham traveled to Washington, D.C. and from 1841 to 1844, Bingham painted in Washington, Petersburg, Virginia, and Philadelphia.

Again returning to Missouri, Bingham in 1845 resided in St. Louis, while his family stayed in Booneville, where he painted portraits and genre scenes for the American Art-Union in New York, a productive seven-year relationship that established him as one of America's greatest genre painters.

Bingham's wife died in November 1848 followed a month later by a son's death. Recovering from his loss, Bingham married Eliza K. Thomas in September 1849.

Bingham continued to engage in Whig politics. He was a staunch Unionist who in June 1861, became a captain in the U.S. Volunteer Reserve Corps. In 1862 he resigned his commission to become the state treasurer in the provisional government, an office he held until 1865. While Jefferson City there, he began his most important political paintings, Martial Law or Order No. 11.

Union General Thomas Ewing, Jr., issued Order No. 11 in 1863 to neutralize Confederate guerrillas by removing the population in four of Missouri's westernmost counties who resided farther than one mile from a Union military post. Bingham believed the order unconstitutional and an "act of imbecility." He warned Ewing, "If you execute this order, I shall make you infamous with pen and brush."

Appointed Missouri's adjutant general in 1875, and in 1876, he lobbied Congress to provide Missouri with money to pay its state militia for service to the federal government. Ill health forced his resignation in 1876 and his wife Eliza died shortly thereafter. The following year, Bingham became the University of Missouri's first professor of art. Living in Kansas City, he married again, to Martha Livingston Lykins, widow of friend Johnston Lykins.

George Caleb Bingham died at his home in Kansas City the following July, 1979.

PROVENANCE:

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DESCRIPTION:

This collection contains a handwritten, signed and witnessed Last will and testament for George Caleb Bingham, noted Missouri artist, dated November 28, 1873. Also included is one half of a stereo view photograph of Bingham's studio over Shannon's store at Third and Main, Kansas City taken ca. 1870, and a photograph taken about that time by Ragan & Ploetz, photographers.

INVENTORY:

Folder 1. George Caleb Bingham manuscripts