



Smithsonian
*Donald W. Reynolds Center for
American Art and Portraiture*
National Portrait Gallery

**ABOUT THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY AND ITS HISTORIC HOME—
THE DONALD W. REYNOLDS CENTER FOR AMERICAN ART AND PORTRAITURE**

The National Historic Landmark building that houses the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery and the Smithsonian American Art Museum is completing an extensive renovation. When the building opens on July 1, 2006, it will be a dazzling showcase for American art and portraiture that celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans. The museums, located between Seventh and Ninth streets and between F and G streets N.W., will be the cultural centerpiece of a revitalized downtown Washington. Collectively, the two museums and their activities are known as the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture.

The National Portrait Gallery was established by an act of Congress in 1962 and opened its doors in 1968, with the Smithsonian's most renowned collection of American portraits. Today, the Gallery has assembled one of the finest and most visually engaging collections of portraiture in the world. But more importantly, the collections contain likenesses reflecting the broad spectrum of human achievement—from politics and social reform to science and invention, art, literature, and the performing arts—that has shaped the American experience.

The Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture (formerly the Patent Office Building) is the third-oldest building in Washington, DC—after the White House and the Capitol. The supervising architect on the building was Robert Mills, who utilized the exterior plans of Ithiel Town and William Parker Elliot. The site selected was a prominent square located on a rise halfway between the Capitol and the White House, originally designated by Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant in 1791 as a great national pantheon for its distinguished citizens. Construction began on September 4, 1836 and it was erected in four sections over a thirty-one-year period (1836–67). Construction of the east wing was started by Mills in 1849 and completed in 1852 under the supervision of Architect Thomas U. Walter, who was also the architect of the Capitol Dome.

This was the first federal building to be constituted as a cathedral to the American city and a “temple to the industrial arts.” After its completion, it became a testimony of emerging American artistic and architectonic genius, and its history is closely entwined with the history of the United States.

In 2000, the National Portrait Gallery closed its doors to the public to undergo a six-year restoration and renovation, which aimed to return the building to its original glory and equip it with twenty-first-century technology, larger exhibition galleries, and unique public spaces such as a state-of-the-art glass enclosure over the courtyard, a visible storage center, a modern auditorium, and a visible conservation laboratory. Designed by Lord Norman Foster, the courtyard will provide a flexible space for exhibitions and for civic, social, and business events.

At the same time that its premises are undergoing a significant overhaul, the National Portrait Gallery is undertaking a major transformation to expand upon its mandate to remember and celebrate extraordinary Americans through educational programs and exhibitions. These new programs will connect Americans with their heritage and engage the general public with vibrant and contemporary programs.

The combination of a restored and enhanced historic home and a renewed purpose will ensure that the National Portrait Gallery will become one of the most-visited museums in the United States.

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