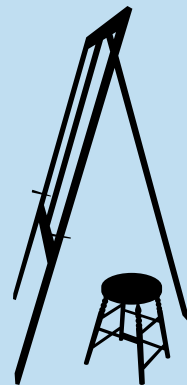


THOMAS COLE

NATIONAL
HISTORIC
SITE

2011 ANNUAL REPORT



Where American Art Was Born



Staff, volunteers and trustees at the summer fundraiser.
Photograph by Rob Shannon

VISION STATEMENT

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site will be the leading source for education and scholarship that inspires cultural and environmental awareness of the American landscape and the continuing impact of Thomas Cole and the Hudson River School.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site preserves and interprets the home and studios of Thomas Cole, the founder of the Hudson River School of painting, the nation's first art movement. Cole's profound influence on America's cultural landscape inspires us to engage broad audiences through innovative educational programs that are relevant today.

Dear Friends,

Having completed our first decade open to the public and our first full year as an independent non-profit organization, 2011 was a year for research and planning. With funding from a federal grant we've been thinking intensely about our guided tour and the way in which we present the Thomas Cole story to the world. Our plans to rebuild Thomas Cole's "New Studio" moved into a new phase, and we were lucky enough to acquire the parcel of land that abuts it. Our ties with the local community grew stronger this year as well, with our first annual "Community Day" in September. Looking farther afield, we were thrilled to help build a Thomas Cole exhibition that is now touring the country. Two key artifacts joined our collection this year: a Thomas Cole painting and the artist's own original guitar. With two new staff positions in place and the implementation of our landscape restoration plan, the organization is ready for another great decade ahead.

Elizabeth B. Jacks
Executive Director

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Reenactment of Thomas and Maria Cole's wedding on the 175th anniversary of the event

EDUCATION & INSPIRATION

We were pleased to offer an exhibition for 2011 that presented another “first”, following on the heels of the 2010 exhibition of women artists of the Hudson River School. For 2011, we presented the paintings of Robert S. Duncanson, the first black painter in America to make a living from his art and to become internationally known. He was also an enthusiastic follower of Thomas Cole, and his paintings most definitely reflect this influence. The title of the show is “Robert S. Duncanson: The Spiritual Striving of the Freeman’s Son.” The curator, Joe Ketner, is considered the authority on the artist.

The other major grant project we implemented in 2011 is the grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to work on our interpretation. We completed the research phase, resulting in three major reports from our consultants Jean Dunbar, Catherine Harris and Maureen Hennessey, as well as the benchmarking report from the board and staff members who participated in those trips. All of the new information energized us as we worked on how to put those ideas into practice. The staff worked intensively in the early spring to craft a new tour, one that focuses on the time period that Thomas Cole was actually at here Cedar Grove (1830s to 1848), that takes advantage of the substantial amount

of original Cole material we really have here, and that uses stories and touches people’s emotions, creating an experience that cannot be had anywhere else. At spring workshops we enlisted the help of the docents in crafting their own personalized version of the new tour – one that accomplishes the goals stated above.

In addition to reshaping the regular tour, we designed and tested a “prototype tour” in the fall, resulting in overwhelmingly positive feedback from the public. The prototype was designed to engage visitors in a more hands-on way, and it included adding guitar music in the Cole Sitting Room, conducting a demonstration of paint-mixing in the studio, and showing various primary source documents (letters, drawings, family portraits, Cole’s artwork) in other rooms.

The other “prototype” we created was a reenactment of Thomas and Maria Cole’s wedding on the occasion of their 175th anniversary in November. The feedback was, if anything, even more positive. When asked to rate the event on a scale of 1 to 5, people answered 6, or even 10! The event achieved its goals of attracting a younger audience and communicating our new research in a new way (i.e. not in lecture format).



Joe Ketner speaking at the opening of Robert S. Duncanson: The Spiritual Striving of the Freeman’s Sons. Photograph by Susan Wides



Melissa Gavilanes, Director of Education, conducting a workshop with local school children

OUTREACH & COMMUNITY

Our Community Outreach committee planned and executed a September Community Day event in the hopes of attracting new local audiences to the site, and it worked. Approximately 200 people came during the 4-hour event, and the majority indicated that they lived locally and had never visited before. The visitor center was decked out with fall pumpkins and homemade cookies, the front lawn held several tables of activities including a community painting, and the East Parlour contained a detailed new exhibition of the ten-year history of the organization that was created by the Fellows and staff.

On September 1st, a new exhibition on Thomas Cole that we created in partnership with “NEH on the Road” began its 5-year national tour with an opening at the Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History in Bryan, Texas. The exhibition, entitled “Wild Land: Thomas Cole and the Birth of American Landscape Painting,” then moves to the Stedman Art Gallery at Rutgers in Camden, New Jersey, where it will be on view starting November 10th.

For the most up-to-date touring schedule, visit www.nehontheroad.org and click on exhibitions.

Another art presentation that we organized in 2011 is the “Claude Mirror” by artist Alex McKay. The “Claude Mirror” was installed on the west-facing part of our porch so that the view of the mountains can be seen in the mirror, which is an oval convex surface that was used by Frederic Church and other 19th-century artists to frame a view and see a scene in a more painterly way. Alex then installed a video camera to film the view as seen in the mirror, 24 hours a day, and “web cast” the view from our website. In this way, people from all over the world enjoyed Thomas Cole’s view at any time of day, in all different weather, and through the seasons. It is a great way to fulfill a number of our goals at once: to present educational programs about 19th-century landscape painting, to present programs that are relevant today, to reach new and younger audiences, and to expand our presence on the web.



A family viewing the Duncanson exhibition at Community Day



DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH

It's not every day that I get to report that a Thomas Cole painting has joined our collection, but that's what happened this fall. We received the transfer from the Seattle Art Museum of an undated oil sketch of a local scene in beautiful condition and attractively framed. In addition, an excellent turn of events has resulted in Thomas Cole's own guitar making its way back to Cedar Grove. Rick Sharp, the new chair of the Olana board of trustees, purchased this unique and priceless artifact and donated it to us. The guitar was sold at the 1964 auction, and Edith Cole Silberstein's recollection is that the guitar had never previously left the house. We believe it is the same instrument that Cole is playing in his painting "The Pic-Nic", and it appears in a photograph of the interior of the New Studio from the late 19th century, lying on a bench next to Emily Cole. This object will significantly enhance our collection of authentic Cole material, and we look forward to incorporating it into our tour.

Also this past fall, we learned that the NEH awarded us a grant to improve our ability to preserve and care for our collections. The goal of the project is to gain an understanding of current environmental risks to the collection, to learn what practices and purchases can be implemented immediately to better care for the objects, and to obtain detailed descriptions of larger initiatives and their costs so that additional funds can be raised to accomplish them.

We are pleased to report that we now own the property in between our caretaker's house and the New Studio site, 32 Hudson Avenue, which we are calling the Knoll House. We purchased the property using a mortgage and a gift from the Naumberg Estate, and the mortgage is being paid for

by renting out the house. This is a major step forward for the site, opening up numerous possibilities for the future, as we now own the entire stretch along Hudson Avenue except the corner house on Spring Street.

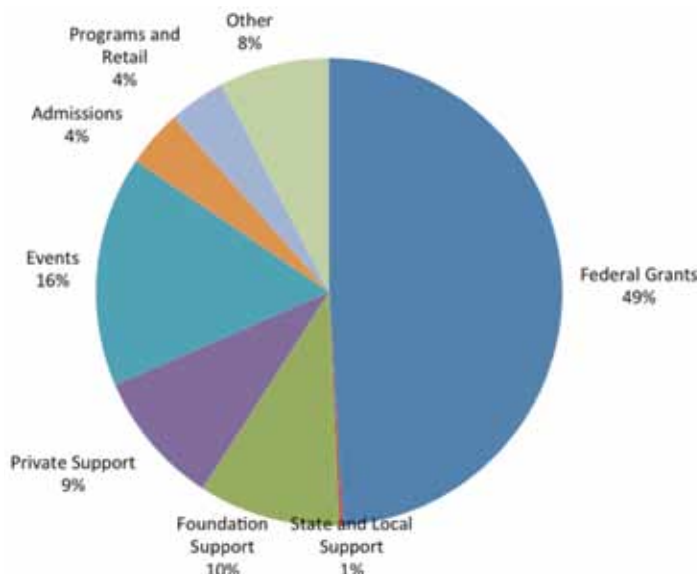
In 2011 we expanded our staff with two key positions, the Collections & Exhibitions Manager and the Historic Site Interpreter, bringing our paid professional staff up to six.

Out along our Spring Street frontage, our landscape restoration project is showing results. The wall and fence are complete and the piers are finished except for their bluestone caps. With the installation of the wooden posts and gates, our face to the community will at last be both inviting and historically accurate.

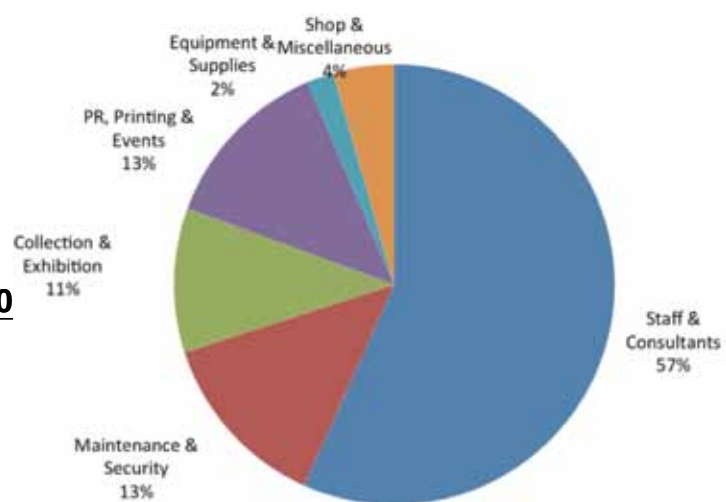
The New Studio project has moved from a "someday dream" to an achievable set of tasks that are underway. The architect Marilyn Kaplan delivered her drawings, report, and a budget. Meanwhile, the fundraising committee has been working with the consultant Anne Ackerson to improve our fundraising capability and create planning documents for a capital campaign. Just last week, a capital campaign expert and friend, Peter O'Hara, agreed to serve as our campaign consultant as a pro-bono project. We can now see a realistic path to this project's completion, and it is a thrill indeed.

2011 SOURCES AND USES OF FUNDS

Total Income: \$498,857



Total Expense: \$486,204



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