



**September 2015 / FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact:** Taylor Metzling - 518.943.7465 ext. 5  
tmetzing@thomascole.org

## **OVER \$600,000 AWARDED FOR INTERIOR RESTORATION AND EXHIBITS**



Senator Schumer at the Thomas Cole site in July 2015, calling for federal funding

CATSKILL, NY - Periwinkle blue walls in the foyer, lavender walls in the West Parlor, a red and gold carpet with pyramids and birds-of-paradise, and hand-painted borders by Thomas Cole himself on the walls . . . . These are some of the elements of the original décor of the first-floor rooms of Cole's 1815 home that will be restored as a result of two major federal grants that were recently awarded to the Thomas Cole Historic Site: \$460,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities and \$150,000 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. As an integral part of the project, the rooms will be infused with interactive exhibits that enable visitors to enter and engage with the story of Thomas Cole. In July 2015, Senator Charles Schumer visited the Cole site to call for federal funding for the restoration project and to announce the discovery of the decorative painting. We are delighted to announce that the funding has now come through.

Around the time of his 1836 marriage, the artist began decorating the first-floor rooms of his home, creating a carefully orchestrated setting in which to display his paintings. It was a project that he was well prepared to do, as he had extensive formal training and experience in the decorative arts. As a young man, he designed and printed cotton fabric, wallpaper and floor cloth; painted scenes on window blinds; and ornamented painted chairs and household objects. On a visit to Herculaneum and Pompeii in 1832, he saw ancient Roman buildings with elaborately decorated walls. Enthralled, he purchased John Goldicutt's book, *Specimens of Ancient Decorations From Pompeii*. Its colored illustrations helped inspire his scheme for his Catskill home.

In the West Parlor, Cole combined luminous lavender walls with a painted frieze depicting folds of fabric in blues and greens. A new gold carpet with a repeating pattern of white stepped pyramids and exotic red birds completed the effect. In the adjacent pantry, the same carpet was

# THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

paired with Pompeian red walls and a dramatic black meander border. The East Parlor featured green walls and an even more elaborate painted border, featuring swags of drapery, ribbons, and a branch with thorns and roses. The full extent of the painted design is not yet known, as only a small portion of it has been uncovered. With the new NEH grant, the careful exposure work will now resume. Once recreated, the rooms will immerse visitors in the artist's vision, just as they did during his lifetime.

The hand-painted decoration was covered over with wall paint during the 20th century, and its existence was unknown until internationally renowned paint analyst Matthew Mosca, under the direction of historic interiors specialist Jean Dunbar, discovered it as part of a comprehensive paint analysis throughout the building. During several visits in 2014, Mosca painstakingly uncovered a fragment of approximately 12 square inches in size in each parlor. The painting is believed to continue around the entire perimeter of each room, up near the ceiling, as a frieze.

To design and implement the interactive exhibits, the Thomas Cole Historic Site has engaged Riggs Ward Design, a multidisciplinary firm located in Richmond, Virginia. The firm specializes in visitor engagement in museums and cultural centers through experiential exhibit design and interactive media. Rather than create a roped-off interior that visitors are excluded from entering, the Thomas Cole site intends to take visitors on a journey into a specific time and place in American history to explore why Cole would paint images that look the way they do, what he was trying to communicate, what forces were at work in America that enabled these images to become so influential, and how these images came to profoundly shape American attitudes. The historic interiors and the interactive exhibits will be implemented in phases over the next two years.

About the Thomas Cole National Historic Site: 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 major art movement. Cole's profound influence on America's cultural landscape inspires us to engage broad audiences through educational programs that are relevant today. The Thomas Cole Historic House is an independent non-profit organization and an affiliate of the National Park Service.

**DIRECTIONS:** The Thomas Cole Historic Site is located in the scenic Hudson River Valley, at 218 Spring Street in Catskill, New York. Located near the western entrance to the Rip Van Winkle Bridge, with easy access from the New York State Thruway exit 21 or Amtrak train service in Hudson, detailed directions and more information can be found at [www.thomascole.org](http://www.thomascole.org).

**HOURS:** The historic site and special exhibitions are open from 10 to 5pm, Tuesday through Sunday, May through November 1, 2015. In the afternoons on Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 2 pm to 5 pm, the Main House, the special exhibition, and Cole's Old Studio may be explored at your own pace, with guides on hand to answer questions. At other times, the historic buildings and exhibition are open by guided tour. Grounds are free and open to the public from dawn until dusk. **On Sunday September 20, the historic site will host a special Open House. The gallery and Cole's home and studio will be free and open to the public from 1-4 pm.**