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# John Paul Jones

(1747-1792)

A Scotsman by birth, seaman John Paul Jones emigrated to the American colonies, moving to Philadelphia at the outset of the American Revolution. With the help of influential friends, he obtained a lieutenant's commission in the Continental navy. A year after his promotion to captain, Jones received from Congress command of the ship *Ranger*. Sailing to France, he staged daring raids on British vessels and seaports. Jones took command of a French vessel in 1779, renaming it the *Bonhomme Richard (Poor Richard)*, in honor of Benjamin Franklin, who was much beloved by the French. On September 23 of that year, Jones encountered a large British convoy led by two heavily armed ships, the *Serapis* and the *Countess of Scarborough*. Although his vessels were the less formidable, the courageous Jones was able to outmaneuver the British and force a surrender in one of the fiercest battles in naval history.

Jones became a popular hero in France following this victory and did not return to Philadelphia until 1781. He next took command of the *America*, a 74-gun ship of the Continental navy. When the navy disbanded at war's end, Jones served as a collections agent abroad for monies owed to the Americans. In 1787 he was awarded a Gold Medal, the only such honor presented to a naval officer for service during the Revolution. Jones returned to Europe, where he sailed in the service of other nations, though he wrote to Thomas Jefferson that he could "never renounce the glorious title of a *citizen of the United States*."<sup>1</sup> He later died in France in 1792. The chapel at the U.S. Naval Academy, in Annapolis, Maryland, contains what are believed to be his remains, transferred there in 1905.

Created in 1904, this bronze bust of John Paul Jones was a gift of the United States Naval Academy Museum to the U.S. Congress. The Masonic Lodge of the Nine Sisters in Paris had commissioned French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon in 1780 to model a marble portrait bust of its illustrious member at age 33. So pleased was the naval hero with Houdon's effort that over several years he ordered some 16 plaster replicas from Houdon. Jones presented these replicas to distinguished friends, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and the Marquis de Lafayette. The Senate's bronze copy was cast from one of these important plaster portraits, now in the collection of the National Academy of Design in New York City. The Joint Committee on the Library accepted the bust of Jones and designated that it be placed in the east lobby on the gallery floor of the Senate wing. The gift was made through the office of Secretary of the Navy John L. Sullivan.

This bust was one of 20 copies made in 1904 from the same plaster portrait. Bronzes cast by Aubry Brothers of New York went to the Navy Department in Washington, D.C., and to the U.S. Naval Academy Museum, located in Annapolis, Maryland; plaster versions were given to the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the South Kensington (today the Victoria and Albert) Museum in London, and the Trocadero Museum in Paris. In 1905 the Trocadero bust was used to identify Jones's disinterred remains, which were then transferred to Annapolis and subsequently entombed in the crypt of the chapel at the Naval Academy.

*John Paul Jones*

**Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741-1828)**

Bronze, modeled 1780, cast 1904

27 1/8 x 19 1/2 x 10 7/8 inches (68.9 x 49.5 x 27.6 cm)

Signed and dated (on subject's truncated right arm): Houdon 1780

Founder's mark (on subject's truncated left arm): AUBRY BROS CO / FOUNDERS. N-Y.

Gift of the U.S. Naval Academy Museum, 1948

Accepted by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1948

Cat. no. 24.00003



**G**eorge Matthews based this image of naval hero John Paul Jones, painted about 1890, on a portrait by Charles Willson Peale. The older painting is part of the large Peale collection at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia. In the painting, Jones wears the French Order of Military Merit, presented to him by Louis XVI in 1780. Peale is thought to have executed his life study around 1781, following Jones's triumphal return from France.

Born in Virginia, Matthews had studied in Paris with portrait painter Carolus Duran in the 1880s before concentrating his career in and around Washington, D.C. Historian and architect Glenn Brown reported in his documentary volume, *The History of the United States Capitol*, that the Matthews portrait of Jones was purchased directly from the artist on April 3, 1890. But the *Congressional Record* shows that discussions about acquisition of the painting took place both earlier and later than that date. The painting was in “the care of the Navy Department” when deliberations began in March; the Senate passed a bill to purchase the portrait in September; and the House followed suit in February 1891.

Fond of historical subjects, Matthews is known for his depictions of *Lee and His Generals*, *The Battle of the Merrimac with the Monitor*, and *Last of the Wooden Navy*. The artist's many portrait subjects ranged from Abraham Lincoln to Jefferson Davis. Matthews is further represented in the U.S. Senate by a portrait of Patrick Henry (p. 188).



**This ca. 1781 painting of John Paul Jones by Charles Willson Peale served as the model for the Senate's portrait of the naval hero by George Matthews.**

(Independence National Historical Park)



*John Paul Jones*

**George Bagby Matthews (1857-1943)**

after Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827)

Oil on canvas, ca. 1890

44 x 32 inches (111.8 x 81.3 cm)

Unsigned

Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, ca. 1890

Cat. no. 31.00012

