



Biography of John Gadsby Chapman

3 Dec 1808 - 28 Nov 1889

John Gadsby Chapman, a painter, was born in Alexandria, Virginia. He was assisted by George Cooke and C. B. King in his early art studies. He attempted his first oil painting at the age of sixteen and went to Winchester, Virginia, as a professional artist at nineteen. Chapman studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts during the same year. He proceeded to study at Rome and Florence through the aid of friends. He painted "Hagar and Ishmael Fainting in the Wilderness" which was the first American painting to be engraved in Italy (published in 1839). Chapman returned to America the following year and held an exhibition of his copies and original pictures in Alexandria. After the successful exhibition he soon began working in New York.

In 1832 Chapman became an honorary associate of the National Academy and a full member in 1836. During 1846 he taught and practiced wood-engraving, painted portraits, and made 1,400 drawings that were published for Harper's Bible. Chapman brought out what is said to be the first drawing book ever published called "The American Drawing Book," published in 1847. He completed "The Baptism of Pocahontas" around the same time. Chapman returned to Rome in 1848 where he lived most of the remainder of his life. He reproduced his own designs and was one of America's first etchers. Few of his paintings are owned by public galleries. His great ability and skill to paint is reflected in his work.