

**The Peale, Baltimore’s Community Museum, Debuts Multi-Million Renovation Among Hundreds**  
*After a 20-year Vacancy, the First US Purpose-Built Museum Welcomes Supporters to Open House*

**Baltimore, MD (May 2, 2022)**—On Sunday, May 1, 2022, the Peale opened its doors to hundreds of supporters, board members, developers, contractors, and friends to showcase the five-year, \$5.5 million renovation of the nation's first purpose-built museum. Over the past 208 years, the building has evolved, serving several vital functions and groundbreaking firsts for the City of Baltimore, the State of Maryland, and the United States.

“Thank you for making it possible for us to present and amplify such compelling Baltimore stories here at the Peale, in a building that highlights their historical importance to the cultural heritage of the city and the nation,” said Dr. Nancy Proctor, founding director and chief strategy officer. “Some of you have been working to save the Peale for more than 20 years. We hope you enjoy the fruits of your dedicated and tireless labor today and for another 200 years to come.”

Starting Friday, May 27, 2022, the Peale will open Wednesday through Friday from 2:00 PM until 7:00 PM, and Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 AM until 4:00 PM. The Peale will host a grand opening on Saturday, August 13, 2022—the weekend of the museum’s 208<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Home to the world's most extensive digital collection of Baltimore stories, the Peale launched its \$5.5 million capital campaign more than 20 years ago to renovate the country's oldest museum building, founded in 1814 by artist and gaslight innovator Rembrandt Peale. Through the support of more than 750 individuals and organizations, the interior and exterior restoration of this national treasure is now complete and ready for Baltimore-centric artists, storytellers, and educators to display their art.

Unlike many museums, the Peale is a new-aged civic museum that amplifies Baltimore's voices, cultures, and experiences as both a laboratory and teaching museum and a production house of culture where programming is community-driven.

Seated in the heart of downtown Baltimore City within eyeshot of City Hall, the Peale Museum building—named the *Baltimore Museum and Gallery of Fine Arts* initially—has served many purposes, including as Baltimore’s first City Hall, the first public high school available to people of color in the state of Maryland, and the birthplace of the Baltimore Gas & Electric company (BGE).

In August of 1814, the building opened as the first museum building in the United States. Exploring ways to illuminate the art galleries once the sunset, Rembrandt Peale used a “magic ring” of pearls of light—carbureted hydrogen gas—in 1816. Later that year, he founded the Gas Light Company of Baltimore, the first commercial gas light company in America that eventually evolved into Baltimore Gas and Electric Company, Constellation Energy, and now Exelon.

The *Baltimore Museum and Gallery of Fine Arts* housed masterpieces by some of the most renowned artists. An 1823 catalog lists the works of Leonardo da Vinci, Gainsborough, Breughel, Reynolds, Bosch, van de Velde, Ruysdael, Kauffman, Claude Lorrain, Poussin, Velasquez, Canaletto, Raphael, Sully.

After 15 years, the museum closed in 1829. The City of Baltimore purchased the building and repurposed it as City Hall from 1830 until 1875. Following the construction of the present City Hall, in 1878, the Peale Museum building became the Male and Female Colored School Number 1, known today as Frederick Douglass High School, marking the beginning of public secondary education for African-Americans in Baltimore. The Bureau of Water Supply took over the building in 1887 and remained until 1916, when the building was transformed into rental space for shops and factories.

In 1930, the City of Baltimore repurposed the building, using it for its original purpose as the Municipal Museum of the City of Baltimore to preserve, collect, and house the City's collection of paintings, illustrations, prints and photographs, architectural drawings, sculpture, furniture, and artifacts. The building served in this function until 1997, when it ceased operations.

After 20 years, through the leadership of James D. Dilts in his capacity as the Peale Board President, renovations commenced to preserve the museum's legacy and revive the building in 2017.

Today, working alongside local storytellers, griots, performers, artists, architects, historians, students, educators, and other culture-keepers, the Peale curates, produces, and shares Baltimore narratives through digital platforms, live exhibitions, performances, talks, and other events.

View photos of the Peale before and after the renovation [here](#).

### ***About The Peale***

*Based in the oldest museum building in the U.S., the Peale is a community museum located in Baltimore, Maryland, and a place where anyone can contribute their story to the City's cultural and historical narrative. Together with creators and storytellers of all kinds, the Peale is actively redefining the role of museums in society and building the largest archive of Baltimore stories in the world. Learn more about The Peale by visiting <https://www.thepealecenter.org/>.*