

July 10, 1962

Mrs. John F. Kennedy
The White House
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mrs. Kennedy:

Stimulated to action by your provocative broadcast on The White House, the Le Roy Historical Society has instructed me to offer for presentation to The White House Collection, an oil painting of Henry Clay addressing the Senate.

This is a canvas of heroic size about 7 x 11 feet together with the original handsome deep cove walnut frame approximately a foot wide.

It was painted in 1866 by Col. Phineas Staunton, Vice Chancellor of Ingham University for women in this village. He was also director of the Art College at this institution. He was born fifteen miles distant from here and died in Quito, Ecuador while serving as artist for a joint Williams College-Smithsonian scientific expedition to South America.

Of Phineas Staunton, this was written in reminiscences of his life and character: "Personally attached to Henry Clay, he has, in the judgment of Mr. Clay's own sons, preserved for posterity the truest as well as the best ideal representation of that great patriot."

This painting was entered in a \$5000.00 competition for a portrait of Clay for the State House in Frankfort, Kentucky. Although it was admittedly the best one submitted, it was nevertheless rejected due to deep seated anti Northern feeling and to the prominence of eminent Northerners in the background.

The painter died the next year. His widow erected at Ingham University as a memorial to him, the Staunton Conservatory and here for 35 years the painting occupied a conspicuous place as shown in the photo enclosed.

This once flourishing university, due to the lack of an erstwhile vigor in management, closed its doors under foreclosure of mortgage and was soon thereafter bequeathed to Yale University.

The art collection was sold at auction at the beginning of the century. Influential citizens of Le Roy induced the Board of Education to purchase this work for hanging in the local High School. There it remained for 50 years until centralization with rural districts necessitated remodeling and new construction. This time, the march of progress provided

no place for its exhibition. What is even worse, new concepts in education encouraged no appreciation of this highly valuable local cultural heritage.

At this point, custody and ownership of the painting were accepted by the Le Roy Historical Society for its safe keeping and exhibition. However, we, too, have found that our own ambitious dreams have not materialized and that our present fine old historic Le Roy House does not provide sufficient height for displaying this painting.

Your timely presentation of the concept of the unique place The White House should occupy in the esteem of the American people, offers the Le Roy Historical Society an assurance of the fulfillment of its desire to have this outstanding example of our cultural heritage preserved.

It is our deep conviction that this painting should find an honored niche at the national level.

The Le Roy Historical Society is therefore delighted to submit for your consideration, without reservation, this splendid example of historic Americana.

Sincerely yours,

Albert F. McVean,
Late Curator of Le Roy Historical Society,
Presently, Member of its Governing Board,
Historian of the Town of Le Roy, New York