NEW LIFE FOR RARE FREDERICK MUHLENBERG PORTRAIT
Local art conservator contributes services to The Speaker’s House

Trappe, PA – A rare 19th century oil portrait of Frederick Muhlenberg, first Speaker of the House of Representatives, was restored by Eugene Bechtel of Greenwood Studio. The portrait is owned by The Speaker’s House, a non-profit organization that owns the house that Muhlenberg resided in from 1781-91. Mr. Bechtel is donating his services.

The Muhlenberg portrait, attributed to Jacob Eichholtz, is a copy of a portrait that was painted by Joseph Wright during Muhlenberg’s lifetime, in 1790. The Wright painting, which hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC, was copied several times during the early 1800s, likely commissions by family members. It came into the possession of The Speaker’s House when a Muhlenberg descendant donated the portrait in December 2007. Although the portrait was not signed by the artist, it has been attributed to Jacob Eichholtz (1776-1842), a portrait painter from Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Eugene Bechtel is an art conservator based in Trappe. He may be best known for his conservation of John Audubon’s The Eagle and The Lamb, one of Audubon’s rarest paintings. “I’m happy to help an organization that is preserving local history,” remarked Mr. Bechtel when asked why he agreed to donate his services. Mr. Bechtel, who just turned 80, has lived his entire life in Trappe. He restored the portraits of Henry Muhlenberg and his wife Anna Marie Weiser, which are on display at the Henry Melchior Muhlenberg House.

The painting is now on exhibit at the Berman Museum of Art at Ursinus College.