



SAUL

at Rendcomb College

Michael H. C. Martin
(O. R. 1926-1933)

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SAUL

of Saul's Hall

sculpted by WILLIAM W. STORY

(b. 12 February 1819, Salem, Mass. USA. d. 7 October 1895, Vallombrosa, Italy)

WILLIAM WETMORE STORY, the son of Joseph Story, a United States Supreme Court judge and professor of law at Harvard University, and Sarah Waldo Wetmore, the daughter of a prominent Boston judge, was naturally destined to become a member of the family profession of law. Indeed, this he did, graduating from Harvard Law School in 1840 and becoming a successful lawyer, publishing a number of legal treatises and attending diligently to his professional practice. Nevertheless, the aesthetic and literary leanings that had prevailed during his youth continued unabated. He wrote poetry and criticism which was published in local journals and fell in with a crowd of Boston artists who admired his skills as a painter and a modeller in clay. In 1843, when he was twenty-four years old, he married Emelyn Eldridge, a Boston childhood sweetheart. Two years later, his father died. This was a turning point in his life. For this famous jurist, undoubtedly the greatest lawmaker the USA. ever had, it was thought fitting that he should be commemorated with a statue in Mount Auburn Cemetery. The organising committee approached William, knowing he had artistic tastes, and to his surprise he was offered the commission. Not believing that he had sufficient skills to carry out such a task, he insisted on taking several years off to study the art of sculpture in depth abroad. So, in 1847 he departed to Europe for three years, after first making his mark as a jurist by completing a very lengthy legal treatise on private property sales, still applicable in

American law. He learned the necessary technicalities of the plastic arts in Rome, returning twice to Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the 1850s to have his design approved for the *Joseph Story Memorial* and to supervise its installation.

Both he and his wife, Emelyn, had enjoyed their three years in the ancient city of Rome and their sojourn had affected them profoundly. They had become enamoured of its antiquity, architecture, customs and people; they admired the beauty of the Italian countryside; they enjoyed and took advantage of being on equal terms with a distinguished and talented colony of expatriate artists, writers and poets. Their decision in 1856 to leave America to settle in Rome and for William to abandon his legal career to satisfy his creative talents as sculptor, dramatist, art theorist, political commentator and travel historian was bold and after six years very rewarding for him, particularly as a sculptor. This was in 1862 when his innovative style and subject of neo-classical sculpture brought him international fame with the inclusion of his sculpture *Cleopatra* in London's International Exposition of that year. It was sponsored by The Vatican City, Pope Pius XI agreeing to defray its transport costs. *Cleopatra* had been completed in marble in 1858 but, quite by chance, the American Nathaniel Hawthorne, on an unexpected two year visit to Rome, had seen it at Story's 'atelier' in its clay model form. It impressed him, as did its sculptor and the expatriate art community, inspiring him to write the popular novel *The Marble Fauns* (*Transformation in England* edition) in which he called his sculptor Kenyon, and gave a very



William Wetmore Story and family; photographed in Rome, c. 1861

enthusiastic description of *Cleopatra*. Art historians maintain that it was splendid pre-publicity, before being viewed by a distinguished international public in London in 1862. Not only fame came his way, but great wealth. For the next twenty-five years there was a constant demand for commissions and copy orders. The majority of his works were in marble and depicted mythical and historical characters, drawn from the Bible, Shakespeare and Greek literature. Included in this category of statues, in addition to the aforementioned *Cleopatra*, are *The Libyan Sibyl*, *Semiramus*, *Sardanapalus*, *Judith Preparing to slay Holofernes*, *Delilah*, *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Electra*, *Nemesis*, *Jerusalem*

Desolate, Electra, Sappho and Saul Under the Influence of the Evil Spirit, the subject of this present study.

Let us examine in authentic detail the chronology of his statue which has now stood for nigh on 156 years in the Inner Hall (now known as Saul's Hall) of Rendcomb Manor (now College), Cirencester.

19 March 1863, Rome Extract from a letter from William W. Story to Charles Elliott Norton (1827-1908, American scholar and man of letters).

My winter ever since I returned from England has been full of hard work, and today for the first time since December [1862 — from the London International Exposition] came in, have I an hour free. My *Saul* is finished (I've the clay model) and the *formatore* (stonecutter) is at work upon it, so that I am as vain and useless at my studio as a partner who has been turned out of the firm. I believe I have told you about my statue before, but cannot recollect. He is seated, and I have represented him at the moment when the evil spirit is upon him and David is called in to play to him. (on his lyre - 1 Samuel, Chapter XVI, v. 23). The action is all interior - the struggle of a half-demented soul; one hand clutching his beard and one fumbling at his dagger. I think it my best work, but no man is judge of his own. (see NOTE 1)

1864 Sir Francis Henry Goldsmid Bart, QC, MP for Reading, of St John's Lodge, Regents Park, London bought Rendcomb Manor. The original 18th century mansion was demolished and construction began of an Italianate-style country house designed by architect P. C. Hardwick and built by Thomas Cubitt & Co. at a cost of over £40,000.

Portrait bust of Sir Francis Henry Goldsmid by William Theed (1804-1891), who studied in Rome under Thoraldson and executed the African Group on the Albert Memorial in London.

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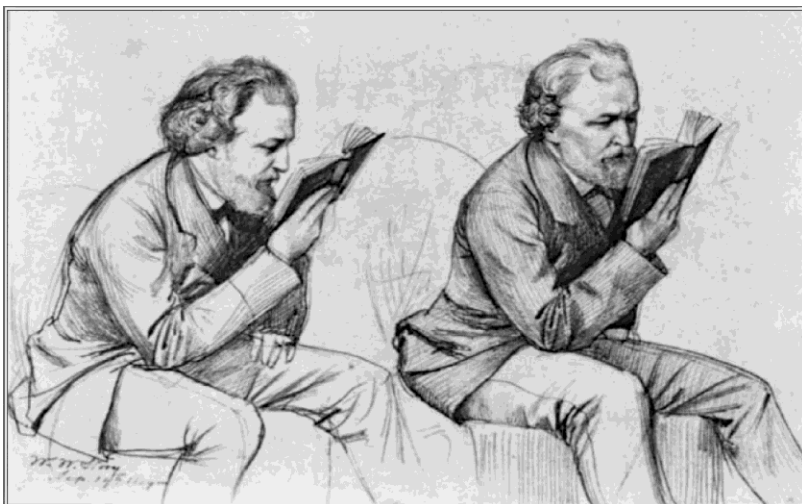
I January 1864, Washington Extract
from a letter to W. W. Story from Charles Sumner (US politician).

Nobody followed with greater interest your English success [Story's sculpture of Cleopatra at 1862 London International Exposition], and now I am preparing for something grander; for George Russell tells me your *Saul* is the finest statue he ever saw. (see NOTE 1).

II April 1865 Extract from a letter from the poet Robert Browning to W. W. Story.

I Rejoice that as good a fellow as Goldsmid has the 'Saul'. (see NOTE 2).

Robert Browning, a very close and lifelong friend of William and Emlyn Story particularly during their expatriate years in Rome,



Sketches of Robert Browning reading at Naworth Castle, Sept. 1869, by W. W. Story

Florence, Venice and elsewhere in Italy, would have been no stranger to the Goldsmid family as his father, also Robert Browning, the Bank of England clerk and owner of a 6,000 volume library had become a subscriber to University College, London, one of whose benevolent founders was Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, Sir Francis' father. The poet became a student there in 1828 but left after a while to go abroad.

9 May 1865 *Catalogue Dublin International Exhibition* (opened by H.R.H. Prince of Wales). In the Sculpture Hall W. W. Story exhibited two works:

Saul Under the Influence of the Evil Spirits - Catalogue No. 23. Priced at £2,000.

Judith Preparing to Slay Holofernes - Catalogue No. 30. Priced at £1,000.

(There was a separate Italian Exhibition Hall with works exclusively by Italian artists and craftsmen.)

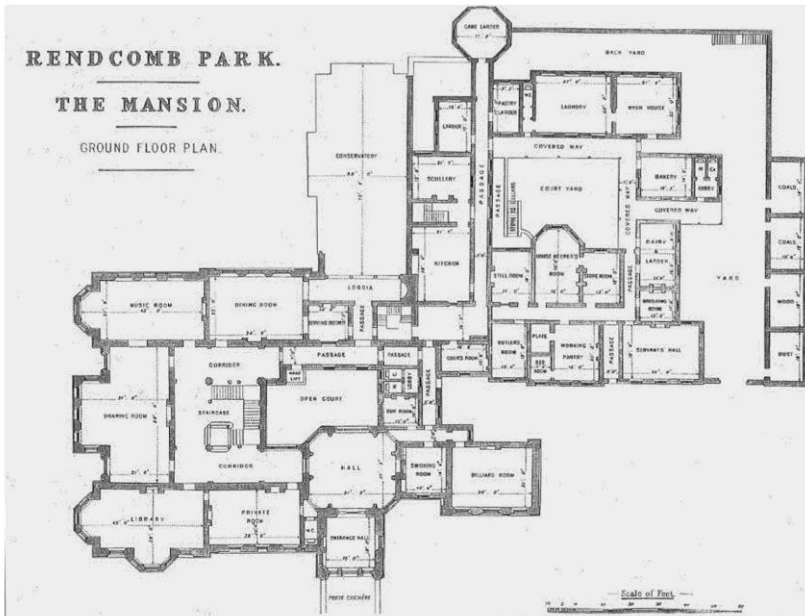
9-24 May 1865 *Dublin Freeman's Journal*. Gives a list of dignitaries, nobility and gentry who attended 9 May opening of the Exhibition. Sir Francis Goldsmid not mentioned. Likewise, over the following weeks, daily listings of arrivals from Holyhead to Dublin hotels made no reference to Sir Francis Goldsmid. Many of the exhibits had not arrived till 20 May and by 24 May consignments arriving from Italy by the Ships 'Spartan' and 'General Lee' had still to be unpacked.

26 October 1865 Extract from *The Boston Daily Advertiser*.

The Roman Government (i.e. The Pontifical Authority) had applied to the artist for leave to send, *at its own expense*, the colossal figure of Saul to the Dublin Exposition, in grateful recognition of the credit reflected on the Roman Department (i.e. The Pontifical Authority) in London, 1862 by Story's *Cleopatra* and *Libyan Sibyl*. (see NOTE 2)

1866 *The Illustrated Record and Descriptive Catalogue of the Dublin International Exhibition of 1865*, edited by Henry Parkinson and Peter Lund, published by Simmonds (London). The editors noted that Story's *Judith Preparing to Slay Holofernes* was sold to Mr B. L. Guinness (yes, the beer 'Guinness is Good for You' millionaire: possibly the same statue that was spotted 'performing hat-check duty in a Dublin pub' by Dr Jan Seidler Ramirez in the 20th century.) No reference was made to the purchase of *Saul*, but the editors described it as the 'finest sculpture in the exhibition *Michelangesque*'.

1867 Rendcomb House (College) completed.



Ground floor plan of Rendcomb Park

As the poet Robert Browning asserted in his letter of 11 April 1865, a month before the opening of the International Exposition in Dublin, that he rejoiced that (Sir Francis) Goldsmid 'has' the Saul statue it can assuredly be taken to mean 'has bought', put more politely. Anyway, Goldsmid had a penchant for statues: when the house became a college in 1920, *Saul* was there to greet everybody, and the cellars and Music Room, had some dozen or so plaster figures in them. Moreover, Sir Francis, who was busy in 1862 supervising the building of his Hove properties inherited from his father, sent at his expense all his workforce to London to the International Exposition, where he, like so many other people, must have been impressed by Story's *Cleopatra*. So, it is not unreasonable to claim that, with his new Rendcomb House in mind he visited Story's atelier in Rome possibly in the spring of 1864 and paid Story £2,000 for the statue. He had the good luck of

not having to pay for its transport to Dublin. He never went to Dublin and he assuredly would not have bought it sight unseen.

Transport to Rendcomb was a different matter. Certainly, it would have involved ship, train and horse-drawn wagon. It could have left Dublin any time after September/October 1865. What route did it take? Dublin to Holyhead or Bristol by ship; thence to Kemble by train: thence to Rendcomb 600 feet above sea level by an eight-horse-drawn wagon? If it arrived in 1855/1856 there would still be plenty of workmen about to ease its passage under the porte-cochère through the front door to the Entrance Hall, then through another door to the octagonal Inner Hall where it was secured with a swivel on a parquet floor laid on concrete and iron joists as is all of the ground floor. Perhaps some enterprising local journalist of the time got to hear of this strange cargo and wrote about it in a local newspaper. It would be worth having a search.

After his successes at the 1862 and 1865 International Exhibitions, William Story continued to thrive on his mythical historical sculptures. Occasionally he produced portrait sculptures of persons he respected or liked such as the bust of Elisabeth Barrett Browning in 1866 and memorial monuments of famous military, legal, academic and philanthropic persons, notably Colonel William Prescott (of Bunker Hall, Boston, American War of Independence fame), Chief Justice John Marshall (the Capitol Washington), Professor Joseph Henry (Director of Smithsonian Institution, Washington,) and George Peabody, (financier and philanthropist, London Exchange, 1869), the first three between 1880 and 1883; with finally in 1886 a very large memorial monument in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park in honour of the author of the words of *The Star Spangled Banner*, Francis Scott Key who died in 1814.

During this period he found time to write. His publications include: *Roba di Roma* (1862) (with a second edition 1863, shortly after

he had completed the clay model of Saul), anecdotes about Rome; *Proportions of the Human Figure* (1866), a technical book about the art of Sculpture; *Fiammetta* (1885), a novel; *Conversations in a Studio* (1890), Essays, *Excursions in Art and Literature* (1890), Critical essays; and several volumes of poetry of considerable merit, collected in two volumes in 1885. Among the longer poems is *A Roman Lawyer in Jerusalem* (a rehabilitation of Judas Iscariot), *A Jewish Rabbi in Rome*; *The Tragedy of Nero*, and *Ginevra di Siena*. The last named, with *Cleopatra*, was included in his *Graffiti d'Italia*, a collection, published in 1868. His long meditative monologue poems were influenced by his close friend Robert Browning.

When William and his wife Emelyn settled in Rome in 1856 they lived in the Palazzo Barberini, bringing with them their two USA. born children, Edith (born 1844) and Joseph (born 1847), who died from gastric fever, in the winter of 1856. Their third child, Julian, born in the Palazzo in 1857, was to become a reputable portrait painter, training at a Paris art school after attending Eton College in England. The eldest child Edith (known as Edie) married to become the Marchesa Peruzzi de Medici, and the youngest child, Thomas Waldo, who was born in a holiday home in Walton-on-Thames and who also attended Eton College, was later to become a sculptor. By the mid-1870s William Wetmore had moved his studio from the Via San Nicolo Tolentino to a purpose-built atelier at 7 Via San Martino a Macao where in the 1880s Thomas began to give professional help to his father, whose fame and expertise attracted large numbers of visitors seeking his advice or training or simply coming to view as ordinary tourists. He visited America only twice to give lectures. Gradually as the years went by, he devoted more time to writing and to travel in England and Europe, particularly Italy, Austria, France, and Switzerland where he built a house in what was then a village called St Moritz. An ardent Anglophile, he often spent time in England enjoying hospitality in London with a circle of artists and literary friends whom he had met through his long association with

the poet Robert Browning. Through his Etonian sons he was often invited to the homes of country gentry. After the death of his wife Emelyn in 1893 his health declined. Nevertheless, he had enough energy to create a monument entitled *Angel of Grief Weeping over the Dismantled Altar of his Life* for her grave in the Protestant Cemetery, Rome. This was his last sculpture, completed in 1894 (his first being the Memorial to his father in 1850). He then left Rome to stay with his daughter Edith Marion (née Story) the Marchesa Peruzzi de Medici in her lovely Tuscan villa in Vallombrosa where he died on 7 October 1895 aged 76, after 55 years of hard work as a lawyer, sculptor, writer, poet and dramatist and 52 years as a devoted family man. His body was interred with his wife in the Protestant Cemetery, Rome.

Rendcomb College staff and pupils should take care of and cherish this famous statue of Saul. It is the original version, there being two others in far-flung places, one in former Czechoslovakia (Castle Bojince Collection) and the other in the USA. (San Francisco Fine Arts Museum, Golden Gate Park). The original plaster figure is now preserved in the Smithsonian National Museum of American Art in Washington DC.

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NOTE 1 From Henry James, *William Wetmore Story & His Friends*, London, 1903 (2 vols). (Available on Kindle).

NOTE 2 Keats, Shelley archive London. Kindly supplied by Dr Jan Seidler Ramirez, Vice President New York Historical Society and authority on William W. Story.

ADDENDUM

The 5 ton statue of Saul was relocated in 2018 to the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, USA. This important work of art is undergoing restoration and careful cleaning in 2019, including repair of the missing toe. Link www.ncartmuseum.org/blog/view/the_coming_of_the_king

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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RAMIREZ, Dr Jan Seidler, *American National Biography* Vol 20,
pp. 894-896.

RAMIREZ, Dr Jan Seidler, Personal Letter, 7 July 2003.

[Wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Wetmore_Story](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Wetmore_Story)

[Wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Goldsmid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Goldsmid)

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www.oldrendcombian.org.uk/rendcombian-newsletters/

The North Carolina Museum of Art – www.ncartmuseum.org/

The Smithsonian American Art Museum – www.americanart.si.edu/

SAAM – www.americanart.si.edu/artist/william-wetmore-story-4670

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