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## Art Treasures Sent From this City to Chicago

Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

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: Art Treasures Sent From this City to Chicago.  
The following is a transcription of an article which appeared in a Huntsville newspaper in the year 1911.

### ART TREASURES SENT FROM THIS CITY TO CHICAGO

"The tender grace of a day that is dead will never [word obliterated] me."

Some weeks ago several heavily loaded drays were seen wending their way slowly toward the Nashville depot. The casual passerby glanced with a degree of curiosity at the huge boxes, but little dreamed what a regrettable page in Huntsville's history was being turned, for much of the glory of by-gone days passes out with the sale of the valuable Calhoun collection of paintings and statuary. In...ly [instantly?] changed is social life in Huntsville, it is doubtful if many of our citizens know that a private home in this town had for over seventy years held the largest and most valuable art collection in the South. We believe there is no exaggeration in this statement and challenge any denial for accuracy. While journeymen are pulling down the last remaining walls of the Calhoun house, and on the gate of Abingdon Place the handsome suburban residence of the lamented Colonel Milton Humes hangs a placard "For Sale," these two residences for nearly three quarters of a century held these beautiful things, one naturally falls into a reminiscent mood recalling the glory on a "day that is done."

The Calhoun house now being demolished was built by Judge William Smith at a cost it is said of seventy-five thousand dollars, a big sum in those days. Judge Smith, a South Carolinian by birth and rearing, represented his native state in the United States Senate for many years, until some political upheaval following the "nullification act" driving him from his native heath, he brought his family and fortune to Huntsville where his remaining years were spent, and where his body lies.

Judge Smith's estate passed to his granddaughter, Mary Smith Taylor, daughter of John Taylor of South Carolina. This granddaughter subsequently married Meredith Calhoun, a Philadelphian, who after his marriage came to Huntsville and resided in the grand old mansion which has since become known as the Calhoun house. In those days when millionaires were not plentiful, the fortune of the Calhouns was considered enormous. They became patrons of art, spending most of their time in foreign travel, journeying in their own traveling coach, one of the most luxurious of that age before Pullman cars were in use. For twenty-five years or more, except the occasional visits to their American home to look after large interests in Alabama and Louisiana, the Calhouns resided abroad, Traveling when they pleased, they had ample time and means to acquire one of the choicest art galleries to be found in the Southland.

It was about 1837 that the two Sabatellis were sent over to their private gallery in the old Calhoun house. These two originals, "Tasso Reciting His Poems at Court," and the "Mother of the Gracchi" or "Cornelia and Her Jewels",

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purchased at what was then considered a fabulous sum attracted much attention among art circles in this country. The artist, Giuseppi Sabatelli, court painter to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Leopold Second, was at the head of the Academy of Fine Arts at Florence, and the most popular painter of his time. Mr. and Mrs. Calhoun naturally desired to own some of his works and succeeded in negotiating the purchase of these two masterpieces. The purchase however met with the disapproval of the King who endeavored to forbid the sale of these two valuable originals. But Leopold's wrathful objections came too late, the sale having been concluded and the King had to content himself with making Sabatelli promise never to permit one of his paintings to leave Italy again. Many of this master's works are to be seen in the galleries of that country. Some of the best are in the Santa Croce Church at Florence where Sabatelli sleeps under a magnificent mausoleum. The above mentioned paintings are among those which Huntsville has just lost. The collection was shipped to Chicago, where under the hands of an expert they will be restored and exhibited and doubtless will attract much attention among art critics. One of the originals by a Dutch artist of the 17th century named Droosch-Sloot bears on the canvas the artist's name in full and the date 1633. Another original "The Coliseum at Rome," a large canvas, bears the impress of a master's hand and will add luster to any gallery in which it may hang. But notice will be especially made in the exhibition of these paintings, of the reproductions, copies of the gems of the Pitti, the Uffizi and other galleries. The art critic who was sent from Chicago to pass upon these works of art pronounced these copies the finest he had ever seen, saying they must all have been done by masters, adding "they are gems which no money could buy at the present day."

The marble statues which are included in this collection will command attention wherever exhibited, nearly all being originals. The life-size figure of "Prayer" by Bartolini will at once be recognized as the equal of any piece of marble which has come to America, and cannot pass unnoticed. The exquisite status of "Paris Throwing the Apple to Venus," Thomas Crawford's first original, should go into some public museum or adorn a niche in the Congressional Library building under the dome which bears Crawford's name. The proper place also for the bust of Ceres by Tadolini is in a public gallery, as there are but few Tadolinis in America. This one, a gem, should not be hid under a bushel.

The "Venus of the Bath," a life-size draped figure after Canova, will rank as high as the originals, being executed under Canova by Pampolino, one of his pupils who afterwards became famous. Many considered this and a small Venus also after Canova (the original being in the Uffizi) the most beautiful pieces in the Calhoun gallery.

Included in this collection is a large table, two and a half feet in diameter, of Florentine mosaic said to be one of the rarest specimens of art which was ever done in this city of gems. It contains every specimen of this art for which

Florence is renowned. flowers, fruit, insects, shells, etc. finished with a shaded border of augilichite....[illegible] black onyx set in ...[illegible] wrought.

The two handsome pieces of bronze, Pluto and Neptune, originals by Drouillard, have been added to the collection with other things by the last owner and will be exhibited with the others.

Huntsville's loss will be Chicago's gain, but we cannot refrain from dropping tears of sincere regret at the passing of so much of the art of our little Spring City.