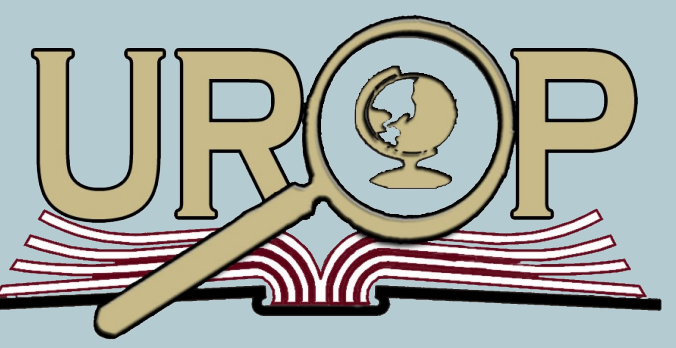




Florida for Sale: Conflicting History About Margaret Eaton



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Introduction

Territorial Florida had its share of interesting individuals come and go; Margaret Eaton was one of them. She came to Florida Territory as the notorious catalyst for the Petticoat Affair (1829-1831), a national scandal involving Andrew Jackson's cabinet and their wives (specifically Floride Calhoun, image 2) ostracizing Margaret Eaton for being an immoral woman. Her time in Florida proved as controversial as her character. She states "We resided in Florida two years. They were beautiful years to me...and I was away from my husband's political persecutors" (Eaton 170), while others question this account. This conflict remains important today because it raises the question of how to be ethical and accurate when discussing a historical figure's life, especially when creating a performance based on the life of that person. That is what Theater with a Mission hopes to accomplish with their future production: *Florida for Sale*.

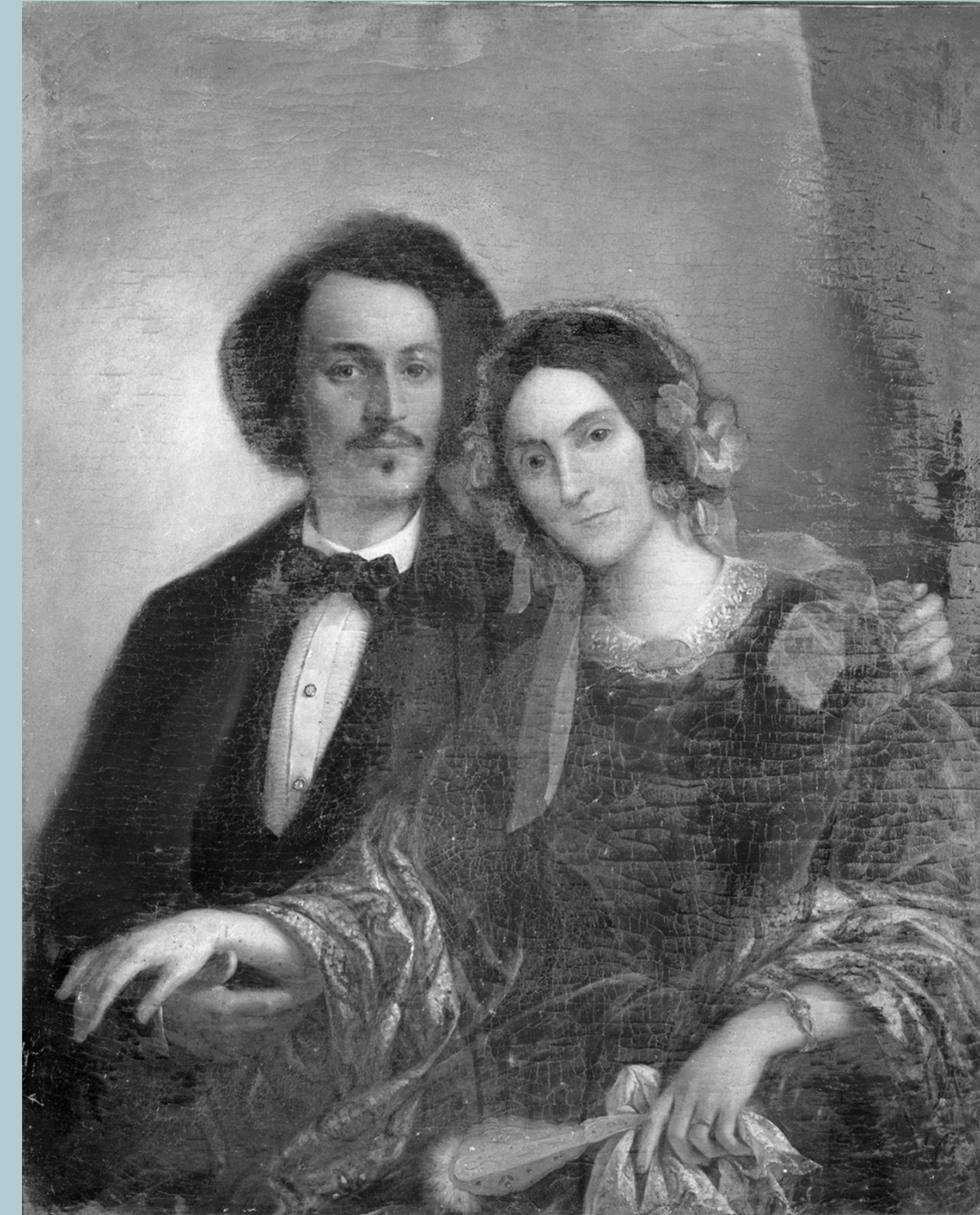


Image 3: John Henry Eaton (Jun. 18, 1790- Nov. 17, 1856) and His Wife Margaret (Peggy) O'Neale. Painting. 1851-1900. Library NEH Negatives. The Frick Collection

Methods

- ❖ Visited a few historical sites in Tallahassee. The sites included Mission San Luis, the houses George Proctor built, and the Riley House.
- ❖ I began to look for books that mention Margaret Eaton. I found her autobiography and used it as a basis for my character study.
- ❖ Found a letter she had written in Spanish, addressed to Maria Manuela de Negrete Cepeda, countess of Campoalange, and Marquesa of Villacampo; it was to uninvite the countess since she disrespected Margaret Eaton's friend "la de Apodaca."
- ❖ The book *Democracy's Mistress* came later into the research and provided a gateway to primary sources about people's opinions of Margaret Eaton, both good and bad.



Image 5: Margaret (Peggy) O'Neill Eaton Photograph By Matthew Brady

Conclusion

This project demonstrates how important it is to research a variety of perspectives about a person or event in order to reconstruct history accurately. Multidimensional research is especially important when creating a character study that will serve as the basis for a future production since reviving a historical figure, in this case Margaret Eaton, requires a grasp of the character's complexity. Margaret Eaton was a victim of condemnation from closed-minded individuals during the 19th century. While trying to elevate her image, Margaret told white lies and withheld information. The 'Autobiography of Peggy Eaton' might have been created out of desperation by Margaret Eaton, as she knew she would always be known for the Petticoat Affair. Researching Margaret Eaton for the play 'Florida for Sale' proved to be a challenge since there were barely any primary sources of her time in Tallahassee or Florida in general.



Image 6: Margaret (Peggy) Eaton as an older woman. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Brady-Handy Photograph Collection 1870-1880



Image 1: Margaret O'Neal Timberlake Eaton (Dec. 3, 1799- Nov. 8, 1879) on the cover of a cigar box. Unknown Artist



Image 4: President Andrew Jackson and Margaret Eaton The President's Dinner to Peggy From a section of George Gibbs's drawing for The Ladies' Home Journal. Unknown Date



Image 2: Floride Calhoun (Feb. 15, 1792-July 25, 1866) Unknown Artist Clemson University

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