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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Emerson Foundation, Seward House Museum announce sale of Thomas Cole Painting

October 18, 2021 (Auburn, NY) –The Fred L. Emerson Foundation and Seward House Museum have announced the Thomas Cole painting “Portage Falls on the Genesee” has been acquired by The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens of San Marino, California.

The painting was offered for sale under an agreement with the New York State Charities Bureau to preserve and expand the historical legacy of William H. Seward. The plan was reviewed and approved by the Cayuga County Surrogate Court in 2018.

All net proceeds from the sale will be directed to support Seward House Museum which serves as a memorial for William H. Seward and his son, William H. Seward, Jr.

“We are very pleased the painting has been acquired by a well-established, US-based institution that will permit hundreds of thousands of visitors a year to appreciate it and learn of its connection to William Seward,” said Kristen E. Rubacka, president of the Emerson Foundation Board of Directors. “The sale not only better safeguards the painting, but it helps to secure the long-term financial viability and well-being of Seward House Museum.”

“The sale of the painting advances the Seward House Museum toward a sustainable future,” said Edward Kochian, president of the Seward House Museum Board of Trustees. “The proceeds from this sale will allow the Emerson Foundation to develop restricted use funds for the Museum. The Emerson Foundation has provided a tremendous level of support toward the operation of the Seward House Museum, for which we will always be extremely grateful,” he added.

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The Emerson Foundation, which owned the painting and had loaned it to the Seward House Museum for display, has provided for the ongoing operation and upkeep of the Seward House since 1951. In 2008, the house and contents, with the exception of the Cole painting, were transferred to the Seward House Museum. At that time, the Surrogate Court specifically authorized the Emerson Foundation to retain ownership of the painting to allow sufficient time to consider the inherent stewardship challenges associated with the painting given its appreciated value.

A museum-quality reproduction of the Cole painting and its original frame were created in 2013 and have been on continuous display at the Seward House Museum, allowing visitors to Seward House to experience the painting and its relevance to the House while eliminating the substantial risks inherent with displaying the original painting, such as fire, theft or vandalism.

Since 2013, multiple independent museum experts were consulted to review the proposed plan and rationale for selling the painting. Each expert independently confirmed the agreed upon plan was in the best interests of Seward House Museum and the artwork itself.

For the sale of the Cole, the Emerson Foundation engaged Christie's, which placed the painting with the Huntington Museum through a private sale transaction.

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The **Fred L. Emerson Foundation** is a private family foundation established in 1932 by Fred L. Emerson. The Foundation provides funding to numerous educational, community, and charitable organizations in the Auburn area and throughout Upstate New York, where its founder lived and worked.

The **Seward House Museum** is an historic home built in 1816 in Auburn, NY. The home was the residence of William H. Seward, who served as a New York state senator, the governor of New York, a U.S. senator, presidential candidate, and then Secretary of State under presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson. Since 1955, the Seward House has welcomed visitors as part of its mission to promote the Seward legacy.