single diagonal that recedes to the left rather than
with the counterbalancing diagonals found in The
Halt at the Inn. This dynamic composition reinforces
the sense of activity and enlivens the streetscape. As
seems to have been his standard procedure, Ostade
must have composed this painting in his studio on
the basis of drawings he made from life. A compari­
son with his Halt at the Inn of 1646 in Vienna (fig.
1) suggests how he may have freely adapted his models
from one painting to the next: the cripple in the
Washington painting certainly derives from the same
prototype as does the man carrying a bucket at the
left in the Vienna painting. Presumably similar
modifications occurred with building and animal
studies as well.

Notes
1. I would like to thank Dr. Claus Virch, a former owner
of Workmen before an Inn, for providing information regarding
the painting’s provenance (see letter of June 1991 in NGA
curatorial files).
3. There seems, however, to have been no scarcity of
storks in the Netherlands if one is to judge from the com­
ments of John Ray, see Ray 1673, 36.
4. Ray 1673, 50–51.

References
1991 Washington: 72, repro. 73.

Paulus Potter

1625–1654

Paulus Potter came from a family of artists. His
father, Pieter Simonsz. Potter (c. 1600–1652) was a
practicing artist, and his mother, Aaltje Paulusdr.
Bartsius, was the sister of the painter Willem
Bartsius (born c. 1612). Paulus was baptized in Enkhuizen, on 20 November 1625. In 1631, the family
moved to Amsterdam, where, according to Houbraken, Potter studied painting under his father. Other
writers, however, have argued that Potter studied with
the Amsterdam painter Claes Moeyaert (c. 1590/1591–1655), whose style was similar to that of
Pieter Potter. Since a “P. Potter” was registered in
1642 as a student of the Haarlem artist Jacob de Wet
(1610–1671/72), it seems probable that Potter would
have also been familiar with artistic currents in that
city during the early 1640s.

By 1646, Potter was living in Delft where he
joined the painters’ guild on 6 August of that year. In
1647 he seems to have moved to The Hague, for in
that year his father registered with the guild in that
city and his sister was baptized there. Potter himself
is first mentioned in guild records there in 1649. On
3 July of the next year he married Adriana Balcken
Eynde, the daughter of the city architect. From 1649
to 1652 Potter lived in a house on the Dunne Bierkade
owned by the landscape painter Jan van Goyen
(q.v.).

It may have been through his father-in-law, who
worked on royal building projects, that Potter came
to receive commissions from Amalia van Solms,
widow of Prince Frederik Hendrik. Potter executed
at least one picture for her, now in the Hermitage,
Saint Petersburg, but apparently did not fulfill other
obligations: in 1651 he was sued by the royal court
for failure to deliver paintings.

By 1 May 1652, Potter had returned to Amster­
dam, according to Houbraken at the bidding of Dr.
Nicolaes Tulp. In the following year he painted the
impressive life-sized equestrian portrait of Nicolaes
Tulp’s son, Dirck Tulp (Six Collection, Amsterdam).
Potter died from tuberculosis shortly thereafter. He
was buried in the Nieuwezijdskapel on 17 January
1654. Despite the fact that he died at the age of only
twenty-eight, Potter’s work was both original and
influential. From very early in his career, he ac­
corded animals an extremely important position in
his compositions and was one of the first artists to
depict them as subjects in their own right. He also
produced some two dozen etchings of animal sub­
jects.

Although he had no documented pupils, Potter
may have influenced Karel du Jardin (c. 1622–1678);
for landscapes he produced around the time of Pot­
ter’s death are quite similar in style.

Bibliography
Houbraken 1753, 2: 126–129.
1942.9.52 (648)

A Farrier's Shop

1648
Oil on oak, 48.3 x 45.7 (19 x 18)
Widener Collection

Inscriptions
In transom frame above doorway on left: paulus potter f. 1648

Technical Notes: The cradled-panel support consists of a single oak board with a vertical grain. Worm tunnels are visible in the x-radiograph and on the back of the panel, and a small vertical hairline crack is found right of center in the bottom edge. Vertical striations are visible from the brush application of the moderately thick white ground. Opaque paint is applied in light passages with impasted highlights, while dark passages are thinly glazed in a series of translucent layers.

Pentimenti of a chicken and a stick are visible in the lower right corner, and minor changes were made in the legs of the standing dog. The sky and dark passages are moderately abraded, and there are scattered small losses and local abrasions, particularly along the right edge in a vertical band. The painting was treated in 1981 to remove discolored varnish and repaints, although insoluble overpaint was left in place in some areas.

Provenance: (Sale, Ghent, 23 September 1777, no. 40). Jacques Clemens, Ghent; (sale, Maison Mortuaire, Ghent, 21 June 1779, no. 212; Neijman, Amsterdam. Johan Philip de Monté, Utrecht; (sale, A. Lamme, Rotterdam, 4–5 July 1825, no. 1); M. L. J. Nieuwenhuys, London.1 Count François-Alexandre-Charles Perregaux [1791–1838], Paris; by inheritance to Madame Perregaux; (sale, Ridel & Seigneur, Paris, 8 December 1841, no. 26); Madame Autran, Marseilles, by 1867. (Charles Sedelmeyer, Paris). M. Rodolphe Kann [d. 1905], Paris and Marseilles; (Duveen Brothers, London and New York, 1907); sold 1909 to Peter A. B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania; inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park.


According to Paulus Potter's widow, whenever the artist had an extra hour to take a walk, he would put a little sketchbook in his pocket. When he saw something that was intriguing or enjoyable and would serve his purpose, he straight away sketched the subject.2 This anecdote about Potter's working process may well help explain how he came upon the idea to depict this intense little drama between man and animal outside a farrier's shop, a subject no other Dutch artist ever depicted. One can only imagine that Potter, on one of his walks near the polders outside of The Hague, was attracted by the commotion caused by a horse whose muzzle was being pinched to open his mouth so that his teeth could be filed, or floated.3 There he must have seen the horse pawing the air with his left foreleg; the intense concentration of the old, bespectacled man as he braced himself to work the rasp; and the openmouthed expression of his younger accomplice who held the twitch. There too he may have witnessed the slackjawed gaze of the young bystander, who, with hands stuffed in his pockets, looks up at the operation in amazement. Inside the shop, hard at work at his anvil, is the blacksmith, taking no more interest in the proceedings than the dogs or the chickens scratching for food. Whether Potter recorded his impressions in his sketchbook or merely carried them home in his head, the subject was so vividly imbued in his mind that he was able to create a work that captured the sense and emotional intensity of the moment.

While the basic compositional scheme is one that Potter had developed in the previous year, particularly in Barnyard Scene: Horses with Figures, signed and dated 1647 (Philadelphia Museum of Art, inv. no. E 24–3–17), this painting is unique in its vivid characterization of a scene. To enhance the dramatic effect Potter situated the action along a shaded diagonal wedge formed by the farrier shop and the small wooden structure attached to it. Long shadows on the ground and the brightly illuminated white horse behind the central group of figures accentuate the chiaroscuro contrasts between foreground and background. Above, gray smoke from the blacksmith's fire rises from the chimney and merges into the dark clouds of the windswept sky.

It is not known what influences inspired Potter to develop this compositional scheme, although enough similarities exist between it and paintings by Isack van Ostade (for example, The Halt at the Inn, 1942.9.49, and Workmen before an Inn, 1991.64.1) to suggest that he might have been familiar with that artist's work. Indeed, Potter apparently spent some