

ARTHUR PRENTICE RUGG (1862-1938), 1939
Harry B. Chatterton (b. 1867)
oil on canvas
36 1/4 x 27 1/4 (92.08 x 69.22)
signed l.l.: 'Chatterton'
Commissioned by the American Antiquarian Society, 1939
Weis 99
Hewes Number: 100

Exhibited:
1940, 'Work of Harry B. Chatterton,' Clinton (Massachusetts) Savings Bank.

Arthur Prentice Rugg, a chief justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, was elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society in 1908. He was made a councilor the following year and in 1919 became vice-president. He served in this position under his friend and associate Calvin Coolidge (cat. #33) before being elected president of the Society in 1933.¹ Rugg was an intellectual, interested in the history of Massachusetts and the legal issues surrounding the formation of the nation. His position as chief justice brought him into contact with powerful state officials and he used his connections to promote the objectives of the Society. His obituary in the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society stated, '[Rugg] was deeply concerned in the Society's affairs and loyal to its reputation. With a mind highly attuned to the value of historical research he felt deep sympathy with the objects of the Society and strove at every opportunity to advance its cause.'²

Rugg graduated from Amherst College in 1883 and completed his advanced degree at Boston University before being admitted to the bar in 1886. He set up his law practice in Worcester and soon became involved in local politics. He was a Worcester city solicitor and the assistant district attorney for Worcester County before being appointed to the Supreme Judicial Court in 1911. Rugg wrote nearly 3,000 opinions while serving on the bench, including cases concerning minimum wage laws, unemployment legislation, and issues surrounding the freedom of the press.³

Rugg also wrote essays and orations on American history, many of which he presented before the historical associations to which he belonged. He was a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, and the New England Historic Genealogical Society. Copies of his papers and speeches, including his 'Farm Life in Colonial New England' (1893), and 'Abraham Lincoln in Worcester' (1909), are preserved in the book

collection of the American Antiquarian Society. In 1920 Rugg presented a paper before the Society titled 'A Famous Colonial Litigation, the Case between Richard Sherman and Captain Robert Keayne, 1642' that examined the early precedents for the state's bicameral legislature.⁴

This portrait of Rugg was painted the year after his death. It was completed by Henry B. Chatterton, a commercial artist from Lancaster, Massachusetts, who worked from photographs of the Chief Justice.⁵ Born in Wisconsin, Chatterton briefly attended art school in Illinois before settling in New York City where he worked for a commercial art house. He did not see his lack of a formal artistic education as a detriment and noted, '[I]f I have anything to boast of it is the fact that I have not had much schooling in art or done the usual thing which an artist is supposed to do, that is, attend art schools and send work to great exhibitions.'⁶ Chatterton supplemented his income by painting portraits. In the 1920s, he painted a set of seventy small portraits of local dignitaries for the Lancaster town hall and he often painted high-ranking military personnel at nearby Fort Devens.

Chatterton was engaged by the American Antiquarian Society in December 1939 to produce a full-sized image of Rugg for the Society's collection of the portraits of its past presidents. He delivered the finished portrait at the end of the month and Clarence Brigham (cat. #11), the Society's librarian, wrote to the artist saying, 'It is a splendid likeness and preserves graphically the expression in Judge Rugg's face, with which for so many years I have been familiar.... I think that you have done an excellent piece of work in painting this portrait.'⁷

¹ Clarence S. Brigham, 'Arthur Prentice Rugg,' Proceeding of the American Antiquarian Society 50 (October 1938): 184. Rugg was influential in encouraging Coolidge to serve as president of the Society. Brigham states, '[Rugg's] friendship with the late Calvin Coolidge was one of the notable incidences of his life. Graduated from the same college, brought into frequent associations in State affairs, and holding similar high ideals of public service, the two men had many bonds of intimacy.'

² Brigham, 'Arthur Prentice Rugg,' 183.

³ The National Cyclopedia of American Biography (New York: James T. White & Co., 1947), 33: 422.

⁴ Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 30 (October 1920): 217-50.

⁵ See photographs of Rugg in the American Antiquarian Society's Graphic Arts collection. The Society also owns a c. 1933 lithograph of Rugg by the New York portraitist Albert Sterner (b. 1863), which is similar in pose to the painting.

⁶ Harry B. Chatterton to Clarence Brigham, 1939, American Antiquarian Society Archives.

⁷ Clarence S. Brigham to Harry B. Chatterton, January 3, 1940, American Antiquarian Society Archives. The December 29, 1939 receipt for the painting, totaling \$200, is preserved in the Society's Archives. In a February 1944 letter to Brigham, Chatterton recalled how the portrait of Rugg helped boost his reputation as a painter, 'I was not sorry [that] I did my best on the painting, though at a reduced price, for the sake of the help expected from its reputation.'