

Stephen Salisbury II (1798-1884), 1878

Daniel Huntington (1816-1906)

oil on canvas

36 1/4 x 29 1/8 (92.08 x 73.98)

signed l.r.: "D. Huntington/N. York 1878"

Commissioned by the American Antiquarian Society, 1878

Weis 100

Hewes Number: 101

Exhibitions:

1891, "Portraits by American Artists," Worcester Public Library.

Publications:

Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society (October 1878): frontispiece.

Stephen Salisbury II, one of the wealthiest men of his era in central Massachusetts, was elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society in 1840. Three years later he was made a councilor. In 1854, after a year of service as Vice President, Salisbury became President of the Society, a position he retained for thirty years. During his presidency, the Society slowly expanded its collection of books and artifacts and enlarged its mission as a research institution by publishing the papers of antiquarians and archaeologists, and encouraging the use of the library by scholars and historians. In 1852, Salisbury donated property and funds for the construction of the Society's second library building, located in Lincoln Square, and paid for its expansion in 1878. A fellow member noted, "We express but a small part of our indebtedness to him when we say that his munificence has been not contributory, but essential, to our fair show and exterior prosperity."¹

Salisbury graduated from Harvard College in 1817 and briefly practiced law in Worcester. His head for business soon made him one of the city's most influential merchants. He was president of the Worcester Bank from 1845 until his death, served as the treasurer of the Blackstone Canal Company, and as director of the Worcester & Nashua Railroad. Salisbury was elected to the State House of Representatives in 1838 and nearly ten years later served a term in the State Senate. A Worcester resident recalled, "The growth and prosperity of his native town he has kept

¹ Andrew P. Peabody, "Memorial," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 3 (October 1884): 238.

constantly in view. He has contributed largely to the development of its resources, has made the improvements of his own property subsidiary to the public welfare, and has given his liberal aid and his often more valuable personal service to every institution and enterprise promotive of the general good."² Stephen Salisbury supported dozens of non-profit enterprises. He was president of the Worcester Free Public Library and a benefactor of Worcester's Mechanics Hall, which opened in 1857. He was one of the financiers behind the Worcester Polytechnic Institute and served as the college's first president. He indulged his interest in archeology by serving as treasurer at the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, where he was an overseer.

Salisbury was also an amateur historian, often publishing the results of his research in the proceedings of the various institutions with which he was affiliated. His "Memorial of Governor John Endecott," (1873) and "Reception of Governor John Winthrop," (1878) were both printed in the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, along with dozens of obituaries and reports written in his capacity as president. Copies of his publications are also preserved in the book collection of the American Antiquarian Society. Salisbury's personal papers, including his business and personal correspondence, account books, and diaries from 1857 through 1884 are part of the Society's manuscript collection.³

In October of 1877, when Salisbury was seventy-nine years old, the council of the American Antiquarian Society approved a motion requesting their president to sit for his portrait. After soliciting the Boston artist William Morris Hunt (1824-1879), who turned the commission down due to his work load, the Society arranged for the New Yorker Daniel Huntington to paint the portrait (fig.).⁴ Huntington, who had studied painting with Samuel F. B. Morse (1781-1872) and Henry Inman (1801-1846), was one of the most successful portrait painters of the post-Civil War era. He produced over 1,200 works, mainly portraits of New York's elite, but also painted landscapes in the style of the Hudson River School. He was an important member of the art establishment, a conservative man who ran organizations well and preserved traditional

² Ibid., 234.

³ Salisbury Family Papers 1674-1906, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

⁴ William Morris Hunt to Samuel Foster Haven, July 29, 1878, American Antiquarian Society Archives.

academic styles.⁵ When he painted Stephen Salisbury in 1878, Huntington was the president of the National Academy of Design, the vice president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a founding member of The Century Association.

In August of 1878, Huntington agreed to paint Salisbury's portrait and arranged several September sittings at his studio in New York.⁶ The elderly Salisbury was accompanied to the city by his son, who reported back on the first day's session, "We made a good beginning today and besides the commencement of a Sketch, Mr. Huntington had some photographs of positions taken. My father sits tomorrow, again Saturday and then Monday."⁷ As the portrait progressed, the elder Salisbury recorded each of the seven sittings, which lasted from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm, in his diary. On September 25th he wrote, "AM Bright, and day warm. Mr. H[untington] said this fine weather enables him to do the work of weeks in days.... Mr. H. said if I would give him a sitting Friday it would then be finished as to sittings."⁸ The following day Salisbury went to the studio for his final session with the artist. "With Mr. Huntington 10 to 1, when he said he would do no more to the picture but shade the figure, etc. I saw it for the first time and thought it as good as circumstances allow."⁹ Huntington asked Salisbury to invite two of his friends to examine the portrait in order to confirm the likeness. One of them wrote to Salisbury after viewing the canvas, "I have seen Mr. Huntington's picture and I am very glad to be able to tell you that I think it a success. The pose is dignified, and the head is well-modeled and strong in expression with excellent coloring."¹⁰

⁵ For more on Huntington see Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin, "Daniel Huntington, President of the National Academy of Design," *American Art Review* 2 (1881): 223-28, and Nancy Rash, "History and Family: Daniel Huntington and the Patronage of Thomas Davis Day," *Archives of American Art Journal* 34 (1994): 2-15.

⁶ Daniel Huntington to Samuel Foster Haven, August 19, 1878, American Antiquarian Society Archives. Huntington sent the Society an explanation of his price structure: "The head and bust, 25 x 30 inches - \$750; The head and bust with one hand, 27 x 34 inches - \$1,000; Kit-Kat, 29 x 36 in. - \$1,250; Half length according to position, 33 x 44 or 40 x 50 in. - \$1,500; Full length, according to size and accessories - \$3,000 to \$3,500."

⁷ Stephen Salisbury III to Samuel Foster Haven, September 18, 1878, American Antiquarian Society Archives.

⁸ Stephen Salisbury II Diary, September 25, 1878, Salisbury Family Papers.

⁹ *Ibid.*, September 26, 1878. See also entries for September 18-19, 21, 23-26.

¹⁰ Lucius Tuckerman to Stephen Salisbury II, September 25, 1878, Salisbury Family Papers.

The portrait was delivered to the American Antiquarian Society in time for the annual meeting in October where it was received with great fanfare.¹¹ Several members made speeches honoring Salisbury and commenting on the portrait, which was called a "speaking likeness" and an "animated canvas." One member said, "So long as the picture shall hang above us it will remind us of the care and generosity united which shall have done so much to place the Society in the honorable position which it occupies."¹²

¹¹ Both Huntington's October 21, 1878 receipt for \$1,000, and the list of the eighteen subscribers from the Society, including Isaac Davis (cat. #39), Samuel Foster Haven (cat. #65), and George Frisbie Hoar (cat. #68), who paid the bill, are preserved in the American Antiquarian Society's Archives (see "Documents 1870-1879").

¹² Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, (October 1878): 16.