

Charles Sumner (1811-1874), 1872-1873

Francis B. Carpenter (1830-1900)

oil on canvas

framed: 37 5/8 x 30 5/8 (95.57 x 77.79)

Bequest of Clarence W. Bowen, 1937

Weis 111

Hewes Number: 116

Ex. Coll.: the artist, sold in 1887 to the donor.

The portrait of Sumner by Francis Carpenter (cat. 116) was commissioned in 1872 by Thaddeus Hyatt (1816-1901). A wealthy American businessman and inventor living in London, he had met Sumner in the course of securing patents. Carpenter, the son of a prosperous farmer from upstate New York, studied with the portraitist Sanford Thayer (1820-80) in Syracuse and in 1851 set up a portrait studio in New York City. He became a member of the National Academy of Design and regularly showed his work at the American Art Union.ⁱ Carpenter often went to the capital in search of commissions and hired workspace over a saloon. A visitor commented that: 'No studio or picture gallery...is more interesting than Mr. Carpenter's room. A half-hour in it is almost as good as a trip to Washington during the session of Congress, so far as it concerns the seeing of political and other notables.'ⁱⁱ Before Sumner's portrait was completed, a friend told him: 'I have just seen your portrait which bids fair to be the best likeness of you ever made by any artist.'ⁱⁱⁱ Never delivered to Hyatt, the portrait remained in Carpenter's studio until it was sold in a lot that included other political subjects in August 1887 to Clarence Bowen, then a free-lance journalist in New York. Bowen bequeathed the portrait to the Society at his death.^{iv}

ⁱ The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America, 1564-1860, s.v. 'Carpenter, Francis'; Harold Holzer, Gabor S. Borritt, and Mark E. Neeley, Jr., 'Francis Bicknell Carpenter: Painter of Abraham Lincoln and His Circle,' American Art Journal 16 (Spring 1984): 66-89.

ⁱⁱ The Home Journal, January 26, 1856.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sumner Correspondence, reel 061, frame 646, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Thanks to Mr. Sears Jayne for sharing his research on the history of this portrait.

^{iv} Bartlett Cowdrey to Clarence Brigham, August 1, 1937. Bowen paid \$325 for the portraits of Sumner, Abraham Lincoln, Millard Fillmore, and Sam Houston among others. Some of Carpenter's papers are housed at the Cortland (N.Y.) Historical Society; his diary and correspondence were in descendants' hands in 1984.