

SAMUEL FOSTER HAVEN (1806-81), 1878
Edward L. Custer (1837-81)
oil on canvas
40 x 32 [Weis] (101.60 x 81.2800)
signed at left: 'CUSTER/BOSTON/1878'
Gift of members of the American Antiquarian Society, 1879
Weis 65
Hewes Number: 65

Ex. Coll.: commissioned by the donors, 1878.

Exhibitions:

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

Publications:

Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society (April 1879): heliotype frontispiece.
Clarence W. Bowen, History of Woodstock, Connecticut, 8 vols., (Norwood, Massachusetts: Plimpton Press, 1932) 4:548.

In 1838, three years after the death of Christopher Columbus Baldwin (cat. #2), Samuel Foster Haven became the librarian of the American Antiquarian Society, a position he held for over forty years. Haven, who also served as a member of the Council from 1855 until 1881, earned a reputation for his dedication to the institution and was admired for his scholarly achievements. For many years, he edited the Society's Proceedings and Transactions, often contributing papers on American history and archaeology. In 1854 he presided over the construction of the Society's second library building in Lincoln Square and oversaw that building's expansion in 1876. After Haven's death, Society member John D. Washburn (1833-1903) recalled, 'He came to the library when it was of infantile proportions, himself a young man, a little older than the library itself. He grew with it and its material and his intellectual growth proceeded, so that, in a greater measure than would at first be noticed, each threw light upon the other...[S]urely it is not too much to say that without the aid of Mr. Haven's personality and peculiar powers and devotion...this institution would have had hardly more than a local reputation.'¹

Haven graduated from Amherst College in 1826 and was admitted to the bar in 1829. He practiced law in both Dedham and Lowell, Massachusetts, before assuming the librarianship of the American Antiquarian Society, a position that enabled him to pursue his interests in archaeology. In 1855 the Smithsonian Institution published his comprehensive study The Archaeology of the United States, or Sketches, Historical and Bibliographical, of the Progress of

Information and Opinion Respecting Vestiges of Antiquity in the United States. Over the course of his career, he contributed several essays to the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society including, 'The Mathers and the Witchcraft Delusions' (April 1874), and 'Humboldt and American Archaeology' (October 1877). In addition, he was the editor of the second edition of Isaiah Thomas's The History of Printing in America, published in 1874, and Records of the Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1628-1641 (1850). Haven's personal papers, including working drafts of several of his publications, are preserved in the American Antiquarian Society's Manuscript Collection.²

The Swiss-born artist Edward Custer came to the United States as a child. As a young man, he returned to Europe to study painting in Munich and Dusseldorf.³ While living in Boston in the 1850s, he exhibited landscape and still life paintings at the Boston Athenaeum, but also worked as a portrait painter.⁴ His obituary noted, 'His portraits were uniformly good likenesses, for no man was more accurate in the observation of traits or more faithful in their reproduction. He had the genius of patience and attention, and his power of concentration kept him from the sentimental and the over-emphatic style of treatment.'⁵

In 1878 several members of the American Antiquarian Society led by Stephen Salisbury II (cat. #101) commissioned Custer to paint a portrait of their aging librarian.⁶ 'It has been the cherished wish of members of the American Antiquarian Society to commemorate in some suitable way the long continued, faithful and important services of the Librarian Samuel F. Haven, who has held the office with great credit to himself and equal satisfaction to the society.' The finished portrait was presented to the membership in April of 1879. Dr. Charles Deane (1813-89), one of the Society's Councillors and Haven's friend remarked, 'The painting itself, as a work of art, is, it seems to me, most admirable. I had the privilege of seeing it in the studio of the artist while it yet rested upon his easel, and I was impressed with it altogether as a superior piece of work, full of life and spirit. But, better than all of this, I was struck with it as a most excellent likeness; as a "counterfeit presentment," may I say, of our venerable Librarian. It seemed almost as if my friend himself lay concealed within that canvas, as if he might, at any moment, cast it aside, step forward, and take me by the hand.'⁷

¹ John D. Washburn, 'Report of the Council,' Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 2 (April 1883): 259-60.

² Haven Family Papers 1747-1908, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

³ George C. Groce and David H. Wallace, New York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America 1564-1860 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 160.

⁴ Robert F. Perkins Jr. and William J. Gavin, The Boston Athenaeum Art Exhibition Index, 1827-1874 (Boston: Boston Athenaeum, 1980), 44. Starting in 1848, Custer exhibited landscapes including 'View on the Connecticut River,' and 'Lake Lucerne.' His last showing at the Athenaeum was in 1869.

⁵ Boston Evening Transcript (January 10, 1881), 4. The obituary listed several portraits painted by Custer including, 'Judge Bacon of Worcester, Judge Charles Allen, Mr. Haven, the eminent antiquarian, and Stephen Salisbury.'

⁶ The December 27, 1878 receipt for Custer's \$300 fee is preserved in the American Antiquarian Society Archives. The artist, who was living at 128 Tremont Street in Boston at the time, billed Stephen Salisbury directly.

⁷ Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society (April 1879): 64-65.