

CHARLES LEMUEL NICHOLS (1851-1929), 1924

Howard Logan Hildebrandt (1872-1958)

oil on canvas

44 1/8 x 34 (112.08 x 86.36)

signed in red paint, l.r.: "H.L. Hildebrandt 1924"

Gift of Mrs. George A. Gaskill, Harriet B. Lincoln and Charles L. Nichols, Jr., 1929

Weis 90

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Ex. Coll: sitter to his children, the donors.

Nichols, a prominent Worcester physician, was elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society in 1897. He was an active member, sitting on the Committee for Publication from 1909 to 1919, serving as a Councilor from 1911 to 1929 and, at various times, as Recording Secretary and Secretary for Foreign Correspondence. In 1927, Nichols became the President of the American Antiquarian Society, a position he retained until his death. Nichols' interest in early American imprints and his Worcester connections made him an ideal candidate for the presidency of the Society. "From early youth he was a visitor of our library and a student of its possessions.... He became thoroughly imbued with the collector's spirit and with a fondness for the study of early Americana.... Since [Isaiah] Thomas, no one of our presidents has undertaken the duties of that office better fitted to be the head of a learned collecting society."<sup>1</sup>

Nichols, who practiced homeopathic medicine at his large practice in Worcester, was also a book collector, with a particular interest in volumes printed in Worcester in the eighteenth century. The year he was elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society he noted, "I have the incurable disease, Biblio-Mania."<sup>2</sup> He collected almanacs, children's literature and books on

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<sup>1</sup> "Many Tributes to Dr. Nichols," Worcester Telegram February 22, 1929, American Antiquarian Society Newsclipping File.

<sup>2</sup> Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 39(April 1929): 9.

Massachusetts history. Nichols donated the portion of his library relating to Massachusetts to the American Antiquarian Society, along with drafts and notes relating to his own publications.<sup>3</sup>

As a scholar, Nichols published his Bibliography of Worcester (1899) and essayed a study of the Society's founder "Isaiah Thomas, Printer, Writer, Author, Collector" (1912). He often contributed to the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society. The results of his life-long study of almanacs appeared as "Notes on the Almanacs of Massachusetts" (April 1912) and "Checklist of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont Almanacs," (April 1928). In a 1920 essay for the Proceedings, Nichols identifies and locates numerous portraits of Isaiah Thomas Sr. and cites his research on their provenance.<sup>4</sup>

A philanthropist who worked tirelessly for many non-profit organizations in Worcester, Nichols was the founder of the Worcester Welfare Federation, the director and president of Associated Charities of Worcester, and a director and board member of the public library.<sup>5</sup> His obituary in the city's largest newspaper stated: "Worcester knew Dr. Nichols, which is the same as saying that Worcester loved him well, admired him sincerely, and respected him profoundly. He deserved it all. The community deeply mourns the passing of this helper of the helpless, this friend of the poor and unfortunate, this physician-scholar-gentleman."<sup>6</sup>

This portrait of Nichols was painted in early 1924 by Howard L. Hildebrandt.<sup>7</sup> The artist was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania and spent his youth in Pittsburgh before travelling to Paris to

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Lemuel Nichols Papers 1851-1927, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection. This collection contains much unpublished material relating to Worcester, including Nichols's manuscript of "Worcester Imprints 1775-1894."

<sup>4</sup> "The Portraits of Isaiah Thomas with Some Notes Upon His Descendants," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 30 (1920): 251-77. His annotated offprint of this article is housed at the American Antiquarian Society. Many of Nichols's attributions have been superceded.

<sup>5</sup> For more on Nichols' contributions to area agencies see his obituary in Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 39 (April 1929): 3-15.

<sup>6</sup> Worcester Evening Gazette February 20, 1929, American Antiquarian Society Newsclipping File.

<sup>7</sup> Worthington Chauncy Ford to Charles Lemuel Nichols, March 11, 1924, Charles Lemuel Nichols Papers. In this letter, Ford mentions that he would like to stop by to see the completed portrait.

study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. In the 1890s he exhibited his work at the National Academy of Design in New York City and moved there around 1900. Hildebrandt had a studio at 306 East 51st street and painted portraits of prominent business men and academics.<sup>8</sup> He was elected to membership in the National Academy in 1932.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "H.L. Hildebrandt, A Portraitist, 84," New York Times November 12, 1958, p. 37: 3. Some of Hildebrandt's correspondence and personal papers are preserved as the Howard Logan Hildebrandt Papers 1890-1919, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C..

<sup>9</sup> Who's Who in American Art 1938-1939, (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1939): 246. Hildebrandt's self portrait is in the collection of the National Academy of Design.