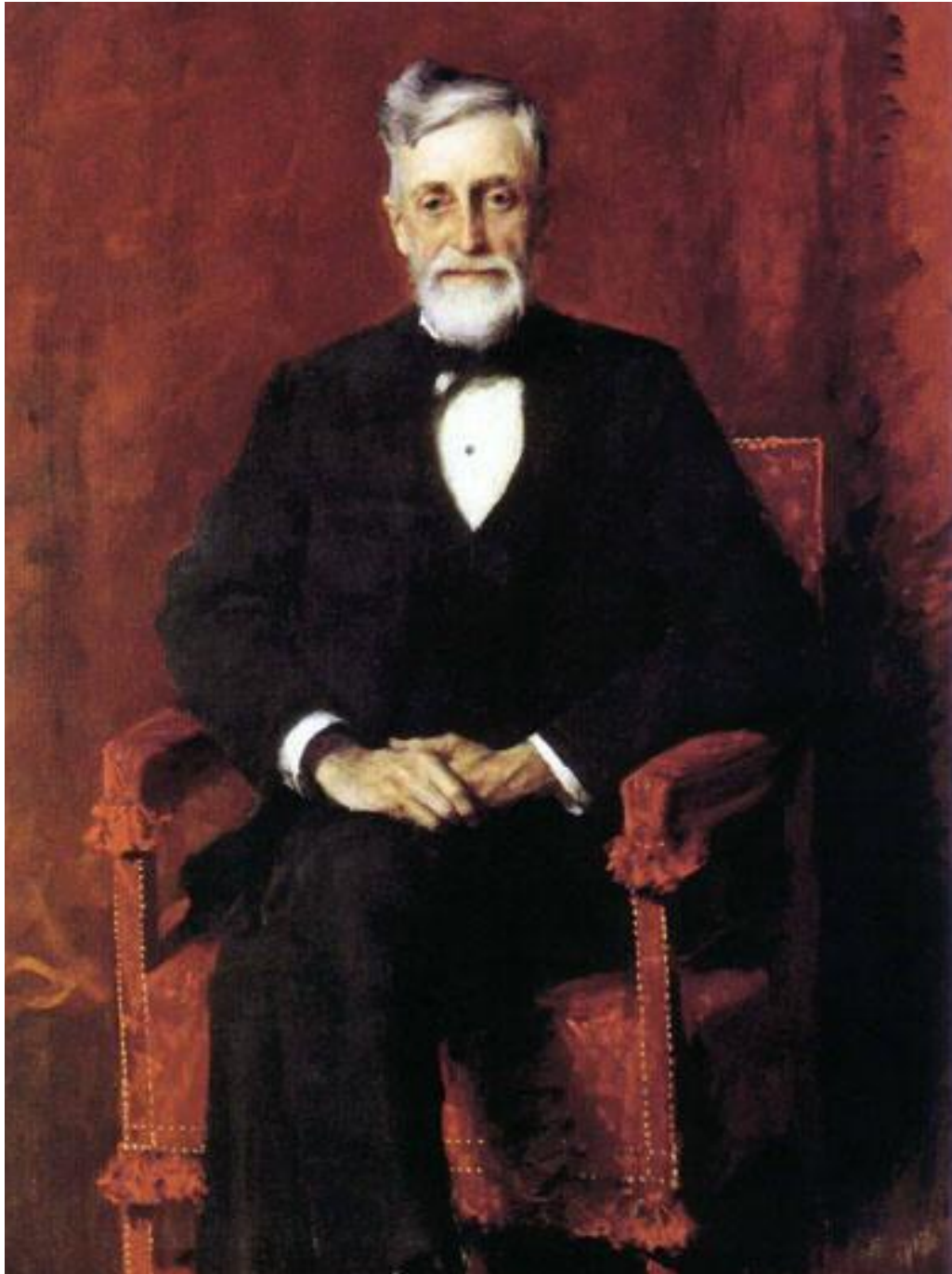


Basic Detail Report



Basic Detail Report



Title: John Butler Talcott

Date: c. 1900

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@28210

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: The segment of Chase's output that has received the least attention is portraiture, including the sizeable group of portraits of men that he executed throughout his career.¹ (1) These works break down roughly into depictions of his own sons, self-portraits, portraits of artist colleagues, uncommissioned "exhibition" pieces, and commissioned works, many of which were official in nature and executed from the mid-1890s on. It is into this last division that the portrait of John Butler Talcott falls. Talcott, born in Enfield, Connecticut, on September 4, 1824, was the son of Seth and Charlotte Butler Talcott. The family was prominent in New England history, beginning with John Talcott, who arrived in the colonies in 1636 and settled in Hartford.² (2) John Butler Talcott was raised there and educated in the local schools.³ (3) After graduating from Yale College in 1846, he divided his time between preparing for a career in law, teaching Latin at the Hartford Female Seminary, and tutoring Greek at Middlebury and Yale Colleges. Although he passed the bar in 1848, he seems not to have actively practiced law and by 1851 was the business partner of Seth J. North in New Britain, manufacturing knitwear and hooks and eyes. In 1868 he founded the American Hosiery Company, of which he was president at his death. Over the years Talcott emerged as one of New Britain's leading businessmen and employers. He also served in various capacities for local companies, including P. and F. Corbin, Corbin Cabinet Lock Company, New Britain Savings Bank, and Connecticut General Life Insurance Company of Hartford. Talcott married Jane C. Goodwin in 1848. Two years after her death in 1878, he took Fannie H. Hazen as his second wife. At his death he was survived by his wife, his son George (from his first marriage), and two daughters, Florence and Helen. Talcott's contributions to the civic life of New Britain were notable. In addition to serving as a member of the city's Common Council and Board of Aldermen, he was elected to two mayoral terms. One of the founders and a president of the New Britain Institute, Butler was instrumental in enriching the cultural life of the community. He must be partially credited with the birth of the New Britain Museum of American Art, in that it was his initial 1903 donation to the New Britain Institute (the museum's parent institution) that provided the first funds designated for use "in payment for the purchase or acquisition of original, modern oil paintings, either by native or foreign artists."⁴ (4) The circumstances and date of the commission of Chase's portrait of Talcott are unknown, but it is likely that it was painted about 1900 to hang in the offices of the American Hosiery Company.⁵ (5) Chase may have been brought to Talcott's attention by Sarah Whiting Talcott, the sitter's first cousin who had studied with Chase at the Art Students League.⁶ (6) Although little is known of

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her career, she seems to have held Chase in great esteem, as her name is included in the list of subscribers supporting the presentation of a portrait bust of him at New York University in 1924.⁷ (7) Talcott's brother Charles, an art collector, and his nephew, Connecticut artist Allen Butler Talcott, who had studied at the Art Students League during Chase's tenure there, also may have brought together sitter and artist.⁸ (8) Chase's image of his elderly subject, though a solid example of this area of his art, is relatively perfunctory in its effect, a common characteristic of the majority of official male portraiture of the time. The painting relies on the European painting traditions that Chase revered and claims as its lineage the work of Raphael and Velázquez, whose images of powerful religious and government officials set the standard for the genre. Chase, like other artists, used this iconography to confer similar traits of power and achievement upon his male subjects. Thus, Talcott appears a venerable personage whose accomplishments deserve commemoration and entitle him to respect. Yet in spite of the conservative aesthetic parameters afforded by the official nature of the commission, Chase fulfilled the fundamental purpose of portraiture by creating an acceptable likeness of the sitter and by capturing Talcott's physical frailty without sacrificing his dignity.⁹ (9) BDG

Bibliography: Katherine Metcalf Roof, "The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase" (New York: Scribner, 1917); Ronald G. Pisano, "A Leading Spirit in American Art: William Merritt Chase" (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1983); Keith L. Bryant Jr., "William Merritt Chase: A Genteel Bohemian" (Columbia, Mo., and London: University of Missouri Press, 1991); Barbara Dayer Gallati, "William Merritt Chase" (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995). NOTES: 1. The only published source devoted to Chase's portraiture is Carolyn Kinder Carr, "William Merritt Chase: Portraits", exhib. cat. (Akron, Oh.: Akron Art Museum, 1982). 2. Sebastian Visscher Talcott, "Talcott Pedigree in England and America from 1558 to 1876" (Albany: Weed, Parson, 1876). 3. The biographical information presented here relies chiefly on the lengthy obituary "John B. Talcott Dead," "Hartford Times", February 21, 1905, and other vertical file materials, New Britain Public Library. 4. John C. White, "History of the New Britain Museum of American Art," unpaginated, undated typescript, New Britain Public Library, Local History Room. White also states that Talcott "may have been the first to propose the collection." See also "Introduction: Collecting for 'Our Factory Hands'" in volume 1. 5. At the time of its donation to the New Britain Museum in 1943, the painting was collected from the premises of this firm (NBMAA files). 6. On Sarah Whiting Talcott, see John William Leonard, ed., "Woman's Who's Who of America" (New York: American Commonwealth Company, 1914), p. 801; and Mantle Fielding, "Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers" (Greens Farms, Conn.: Modern Books and Crafts, 1974), p. 360. 7. "Memorial Exercises Attending the Unveiling of a Bust of William M. Chase" (New York: New York University, 1924). 8. Allen Butler Talcott, "Painter of Landscapes: An Allen Butler Talcott, "Painter of Landscapes: An Eightieth Birthday Exhibition for The New Britain Museum of American Art", exhib. cat. (New Britain: New Britain

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Museum of American Art, 1983). 9. The portrait closely resembles a photograph of Talcott that accompanied his obituary in the "Hartford Times", which also notes that he had been in "delicate health" for several years. 10. Allen Butler Talcott, "Painter of Landscapes: An Eightieth Birthday Exhibition for The New Britain Museum of American Art", exhib. cat. (New Britain: New Britain Museum of American Art, 1983). 11. The portrait closely resembles a photograph of Talcott that accompanied his obituary in the "Hartford Times", which also notes that he had been in "delicate health" for several years.

Dimensions: 48 x 36 in. (121.9 x 91.4 cm)