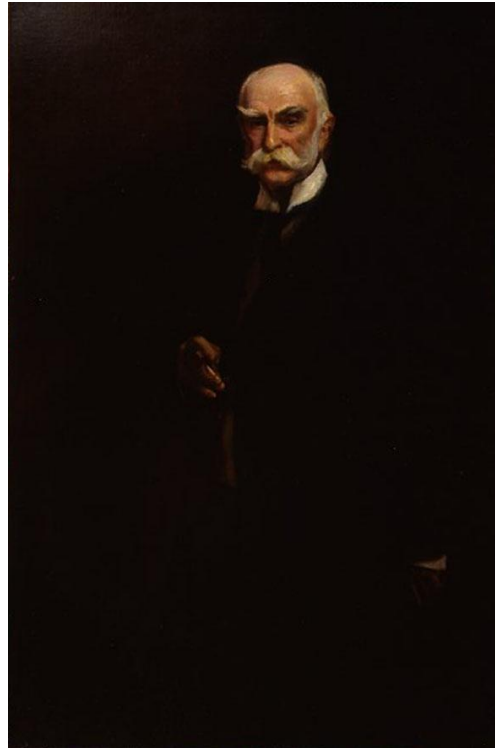


John Singer Sargent at the Harvard Club of New York



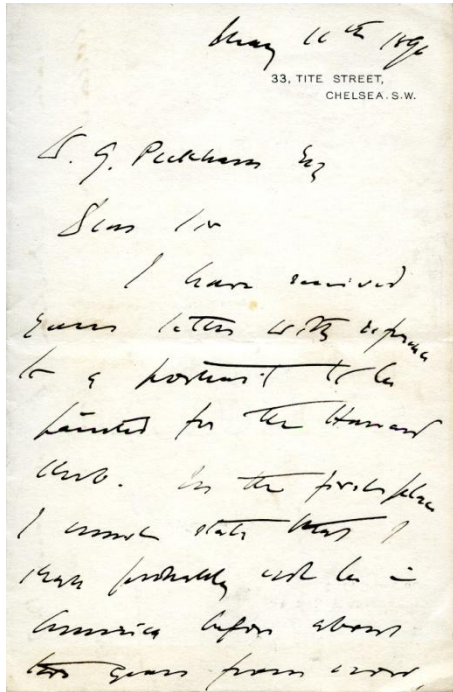
Joseph Hodges Choate C'1852, L'1854, Hon' 1888



James Coolidge Carter C' 1850, L'1853, Hon'1885

The Harvard Club art collection holds 83 painted portraits and provides an excellent overview of American portraiture from the mid 19th century to the present. Many illustrious artists are represented but none so acclaimed as John Singer Sargent *Hon'1916* (1856-1925). The Sargent portraits in Harvard Hall of Joseph Hodges Choate and James Coolidge Carter are the jewels of the collection. This was the expressed intention of the members who honored these two men with portraiture's greatest master of his time. These two distinguished men were colleagues at Harvard, early members of the Harvard Club, each president of the Club twice and dearly beloved by the members. They were considered the preeminent lawyers of their time. Both rose to fame in the 1870s as a young prosecuting attorneys committed to ending the organized corruption of Boss Tweed's Tammany Hall. Their efforts resulted in an historic verdict that reclaimed sixty-million dollars of misappropriated public funds. Perhaps their most interesting legal connection was in 1895 in the U.S. Supreme Court when they argued against each other the merits and legality of a proposed federal income tax. Close friends, Choate once said of Carter, "When Carter retires he will leave room for a thousand lawyers." The two men were fixtures of New York society and Club life. In 1890 the Harvard Club wished to honor these men with portraits and to have them painted by no less than John Singer Sargent. A committee was formed to raise money by subscription. All members received a letter which included the comment, "Sargent is the one American who can do the job fitly, in oil." The fundraising went reasonably well but was interrupted by the effort to collect funds for the construction of the Clubhouse at 27 West 44th Street in 1892. Once the building was up, the efforts commenced again and eventually Sargent's prices were realized. The next problem was to connect the men with the artist. Besides a long line of people waiting to be painted, the artist was working on a vast mural project for McKim, Mead & White's new Boston Public Library, an enormous project that consumed his

life from 1890 - 1919. Here is a letter in the Club archives written by Sargent to W.G. Peckham, the man charged with raising the money for the portraits. Sargent's fee for a full length portrait was four-thousand dollars, while at that time an average artist would have charged four hundred.



May 11, 1896
33, TITE Street,
CHELSEA, S.W.

W.G. Peckham, Esq.

Dear Sir,

I have received your letters with reference to a portrait to be painted for the Harvard Club. In the first place I must state that I shall probably not be in America before about two years from now, and that I will be exclusively engaged upon my Library decorations until next spring, when I shall do some portraits here in London.

My prices are 2000, 3000 and 4000 dollars for head & shoulders, ¾ length and full-length respectively. If, as you intimate, the Harvard Club has difficulty in making these figures, I would consider a reduction of five hundred dollars on each of them. The choice of size must be with the committee.

Believe me, sir
Yours very truly
John S. Sargent

The project was on hold until 1899 when Choate was appointed by President McKinley to replace John Hay as Ambassador to the United Kingdom. A rousing farewell dinner was given by the Harvard Club on the eve of his departure. The portrait committee quickly communicated with Sargent that their subject would soon be in England. The two men connected and the portrait was completed in Sargent's Tite Street studio in London.



Sargent's Tite Street studio



During the summer of the same year James C. Carter's portrait was also finished. The companion portraits were fitted with matching frames by Sargent's framer in London and shipped to New York late in the year.

Besides creating sculpture and murals for the Boston Public Library, Sargent's busy schedule of production in the year of 1899 also included many astonishing portraits, including these examples.



M. Carey Thomas, President of Bryn Mawr, 1899



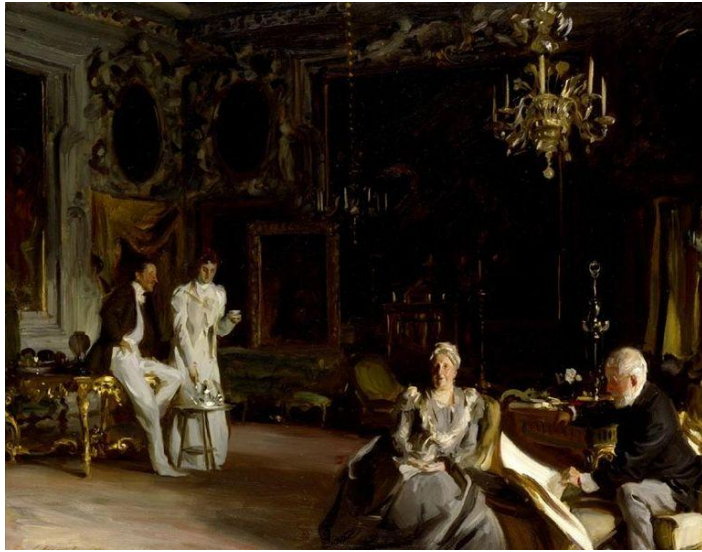
Mrs. Joshua Montgomery Sears, 1899



Lord Russell of Killowen, 1899



Sir David Richmond, 1899



Interior in Venice (Mrs. Daniel S. Curtis and Family), 1899



The Wyndham Sisters, 1899

The Club's portraits were unveiled at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel where the Annual Dinner was held on January 22, 1900. After ten years of planning, fundraising, posing and painting, the dedication was celebrated by an enormous crowd of Choate and Carter admirers including Harvard President Charles W. Eliot and New York Governor Theodore Roosevelt. The portraits were installed in the only room in the Club that would hold them at that time, the Library, (now the Gordon Reading Room) but 1905 the portraits were the first to be installed in the newly opened Harvard Hall.

Sargent was such an outstanding figure of the world in the early 20th century, it is no wonder that this artist has had a further impact on the collection of the Harvard Club.

In 1905 Sargent painted the official Presidential portrait of President Theodore Roosevelt C' 1880, which still hangs prominently in the East Room of the White House. In 1920 the Club asked Sargent to make a copy for our collection of U.S. Presidents with Harvard affiliations. Unsurprisingly, the artist was too busy but suggested his friend, Alexander R. James, a Cambridge artist and son of the philosopher William James. The young artist travelled to Washington D.C. and by special permission removed the portrait to the Corcoran Gallery where he painted an excellent copy which can be seen in Harvard Hall.

In the Club guestroom 422 is a framed reproduction of a Sargent drawing of Kirsopp Lake, honorary member of the Class of 1894. Lake was a prominent biblical scholar and archaeologist who taught at Harvard from 1914-1938. His wildly popular class, "The English Bible," was moved to larger and larger auditorium. Sargent drew his friend's portrait in 1923, while in Cambridge.

Most remarkably, one of Sargent's masterpieces, *The Chess Game*, was owned by the Club for fifty years. It is one of his "private paintings" created while on vacation from portraiture. This impressionist gem was painted in the Italian Alps circa 1908 and was donated to the Club in

1951 by Mrs. Francis Weld, the widow of President Weld. It was given to decorate the newly inaugurated Weld Room on the third floor. The gift also included a painting by Winslow Homer, *Fishermen's Wives* (in the main Lobby). *The Chess Game* was the prize of the Club's art collection until it was sold to a private collector in 2000 to raise funds the construction of the "new" building, 35 W 44th Street, which opened in 2003. A life-sized photographic copy of *The Chess Game* hangs in the Weld Room today.



Theodore Roosevelt (after Sargent)



Kirsopp Lake



The Chess Game

John Singer Sargent's connection to Harvard is even more significant. His portraits Henry Lee Higginson (1903), President Eliot (1907), and President Lowell (1923) are familiar to all the Harvard community.



Henry Lee Higginson, 1903

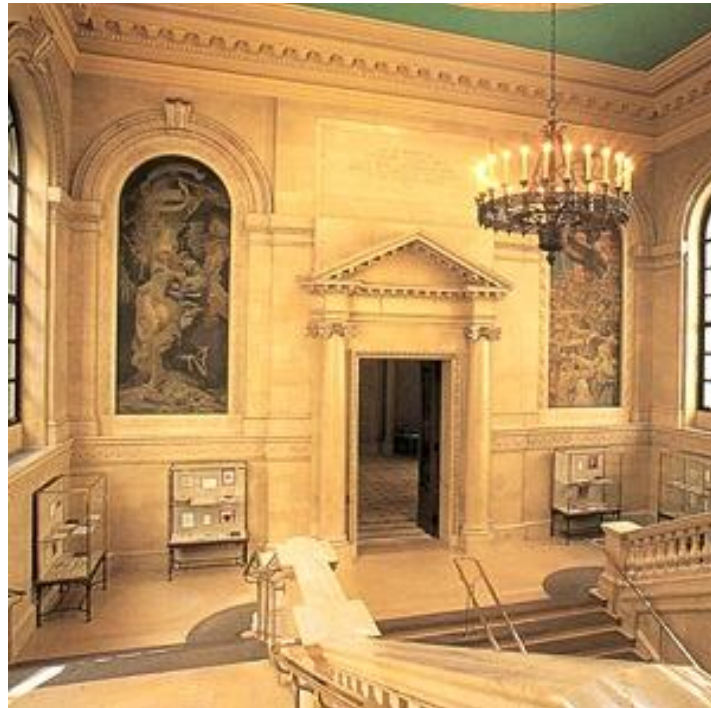


President Charles W. Eliot, 1907



President Abbott Lowell, 1923

In 1920 Sargent was commissioned by Harvard to create mural decorations for Widener Library to memorialize Harvard's sacrifice in World War I.



Widener Library-- *Death and Victory. Entering the War, 1922*

On June 22, 1916 at Harvard Commencement, held in the new Stadium for the first time, John Singer Sargent was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Arts. His citation read:

When we and all the things we see about us here are seen no more, the canvas his brush has touched, men will still gaze upon with wonder.



Any questions, comments, suggestions, please write msaunders@hcnyc.com
Mary Saunders, Curator