

**MUSEUM OF FINE
ARTS,
BOSTON, 1870-1920**

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Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1870-1920 by Benjamin Ives Gilman

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BENJAMIN IVES GILMAN

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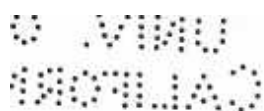
UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

BOSTON

1870-1920





Gift

FROM THE ACT OF
INCORPORATION, FEBRUARY 4, 1870

Section 1. MARTIN BRIMMER, CHARLES C. PERKINS, CHARLES W. ELIOT, WILLIAM ENDICOTT, Jr., SAMUEL ELIOT, FRANCIS E. PARKER, HENRY P. KIDDER, WILLIAM B. ROGERS, GEORGE B. EMERSON, OTIS NORCROSS, JOHN T. BRADLEE, and BENJAMIN S. ROTCH, together with three persons to be annually appointed by the President and Fellows of Harvard College, with the consent of the Board of Overseers, three persons to be annually appointed by the Trustees of the Boston Athenaeum, and three persons to be annually appointed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, if the said corporations shall make such appointments, and the Mayor of the City of Boston, the President of the Trustees of the Public Library, and the Superintendent of Public Schools of said city, the Secretary of the Board of Education, and the Trustee of the Lowell Institute, *ex officio*, are hereby made a body corporate, by the name of the Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts for the purpose of erecting a Museum for the preservation and exhibition of works of art, of making, maintaining and exhibiting collections of such works, and of affording instruction in the Fine Arts, with all the powers and privileges, and subject to all the duties, liabilities, and restrictions set forth in Chapter sixty-eight of the General Statutes, and acts in addition thereto.

TRUSTEES OF THE MUSEUM 1920

HOLKER ABBOTT	MORRIS GRAY
THOMAS ALLEN	AUGUSTUS HEMENWAY
HENRY FORBES BIGELOW	EDWARD JACKSON HOLMES
WILLIAM STURGIS BIGELOW	ALEXANDER WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW
CHARLES KNOWLES BOLTON	ABBOTT LAWRENCE LOWELL
GEORGE HENRY CHASE	ALEXANDER MANN
JOHN TEMPLEMAN COOLIDGE	ANDREW JAMES PETERS
JOSEPH RANDOLPH COOLIDGE, Jr.	DUDLEY LEAVITT PICKMAN
CHARLES WILLIAM ELIOT	DENMAN WALDO ROSS
WILLIAM ENDICOTT	CHARLES SPRAGUE SARGENT
WILLIAM CROWNSHIELD ENDICOTT	HENRY LEE SHATTUCK
DESMOND FITZGERALD	PATSON SMITH
EDWARD WALDO FORBES	ELIHU THOMSON
GEORGE PEABODY GARDNER	FRANK VICTOR THOMPSON
GEORGE ROBERT WHITE	

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

BOSTON.

1870—1920

N^o
A9



HUNTINGTON AVENUE ENTRANCE

71. Qu. Whether Pictures and Statues are not in fact so much Treasure? And whether Rome and Florence would not be poor Towns without them?

Bishop BERKELEY,
"The Querist," 1735.

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS in Boston occupies a unique position among the greater museums of the country, and perhaps of the world, in that it was created and has been supported to this day solely by private citizens; and not a few only, but thousands and even tens of thousands. It remains for the citizenship of the present to acknowledge the unusual honor of this burden by continuing to bear it in a way to do credit to its brilliant past.

Funds

The first to be named in the long and distinguished line of those who have joined in making the Museum of Fine Arts what it is are the few far-sighted men, who, about fifty-five years ago, together transferred to the City a considerable plot of ground in the then Back Bay Fens, to be held as a public trust, for eventual use either as a public

square or for an institute of fine arts. In fulfilment of the condition, when, some years later, representatives of several societies and institutions — the Athenaeum, Harvard College, and the Institute of Technology among them — proposed the foundation of a museum of art, the City offered the restricted plot under the proviso that the



THE FIRST HOME OF THE MUSEUM
Athenaeum Galleries, 1872

Museum should be free to all at least four days a month. From the beginning it was free on Saturdays, and within a year, by the addition of Sunday, the provision was doubly fulfilled.

Now, at its semi-centennial, the Museum is open free to all at all times, excepting on the three chief holidays, national, social, and religious, of every year — July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

The second gift to the Museum likewise gave evidence of an interest in the project outside the circle of its immediate promoters. The fund for the bronze statue of Edward Everett, now standing in the square of that name in Dorchester, had been over-subscribed, and as soon as the Museum received its charter, in 1870, the committee in charge of the memorial turned over the balance, amounting to about \$7500, to the newly appointed Trustees, who have continued to hold it as a permanent fund, employing the income at their discretion.

Among the sponsors for the Museum themselves, the initial effort to obtain money took the form of a popular subscription for the first section of the building planned to be erected in Copley Square on the property just received by deed from the City. A quarter of a million dollars was eventually obtained from more than a thousand givers in



THE FIRST MUSEUM ON COPLEY SQUARE

sums ranging from thirty-five cents to twenty-five thousand dollars. Two years later, one hundred other gifts, amounting to half this sum, were obtained for an addition to the building in sums from one dollar to ten thousand dollars; and nine years afterward for another addition another quarter of a million dollars was subscribed in sums from one dollar to twenty-four thousand.

Meantime the initiative of the Everett trustees had begun to bear its fruits. Considerable gifts of money, together with a bequest, are recorded within a few months after the opening of the first wing of the first building in Copley Square; and during the fifty years that have elapsed since, the number of those who have contributed to the permanent endowment of the Museum by bequest or gift has risen to about one hundred. Only two of the funds so established exceed three hundred thousand dollars: one consisting of property assessed at above that figure in 1912 and worth much more, and one of eight hundred thousand dollars, received in 1898. Among the other funds now held by the Trustees, there is one of five hundred dollars, there

are several of a thousand, many of ten thousand, a number of one hundred thousand, and a few above that figure. Although the roll of testators and givers recalls many of those most active in the Museum during life, it names also many of whom the Museum first heard through their generous farewell. The Museum knew nothing of the charitable intention of the two friends who in 1895 joined in bequeathing funds of fifty thousand dollars each for the purchase of modern pictures; nor was it known that the master of a Boston school had looked forward to making the Museum his heir until in the same year a bequest of ninety-three thousand dollars revealed the fact.

To the group of a hundred benefactors who have endowed the Museum and to the many hundreds who contributed to its first building, there have added themselves in the course of its life many thousands of givers of money for its current maintenance and expansion. Chief among the number are the Subscribers to the Museum, whose annual gifts have risen from \$11,000 in 1889 to over \$50,000 in 1920.

The idea of founding a museum of art in Boston owed its origin to the same public spirit that responded to the suggestion by creating and maintaining the institution. The owners of several collections of art desired to make them more generally available to the public in a central place. Harvard College wished to show its engravings; the Institute of Technology its architectural casts; and the Athenaeum its pictures, sculptures, and other objects. For years the contents of the Museum continued to be mostly the possessions of others, temporarily shown here; and loans from both public and private sources still are and always will be a large element in the exhibits. Several of



JOHN HANCOCK

J. S. Copley (1757-1815)

the Revolutionary portraits shown at the Museum are loans by the city of Boston, transferred from Faneuil Hall where their places are taken by copies. The Institute of Technology eventually withdrew its casts, and Harvard College its engravings for independent exhibition elsewhere. But the collections of the Athenaeum became an indefinite deposit — an earnest of the gifts outright by which the Museum was largely to grow. In 1874, while the first building was still a project, Senator Sumner bequeathed to the Trustees a collection of paintings and engravings; and the first exhibition by the Museum in the Athenaeum building, two years before, had included a number of gifts from many sources, among them an important collection of Egyptian antiquities.

Conspicuous in the Athenaeum deposit are the portraits of George Washington and Martha Washington, by Gilbert Stuart, by which these two bodily presences will best