

2011: The Year of the Portrait **By Matthew Hofstedt, Associate Curator**

Since its inception in 1974, the Supreme Court Historical Society has actively assisted the Supreme Court with acquiring portraits for its permanent collection. While the Society has routinely helped with the collection of funds to commission portraits of sitting, or recently retired Justices, opportunities to acquire period portraits have been relatively rare, the last occurring nearly 30 years ago. This drought ended in 2011 with a flood of portrait acquisitions: three portraits of former Justices and one of a former Reporter of Decisions.

Associate Justice John McLean, by an unknown artist, c. 1850.

In early 2010, the Society was asked to help identify the subject of an oil portrait owned by Ms. Elizabeth Kiley of Corona Del Mar, California. She wondered if the painting, purchased by her parents in an antiques shop in California in the 1960s and passed down in her family as “Uncle Ralph,” could be a Supreme Court Justice? In consultation with the Curator’s Office, the subject was identified as none other than John McLean, who served on the Court from 1829 to 1861. Additional research may attribute the unsigned work to the American portrait artist G.P.A. Healy.

While the Court already owned a portrait of McLean, presented by Mr. Herbert Pratt in 1941, it showed a much younger McLean, in his mid-30s, painted years before he joined the Court. The new portrait shows him about 65 years old, capturing a man in the midst of his judicial career and with a pose indicative of his presidential aspirations! The opportunity to add such a significant portrait led to negotiations with Ms. Kiley that ended with its purchase. In January 2012, conservation treatment was completed and a suitable period frame was located. Once the frame is restored, the portrait will be placed in the Supreme Court Building.

Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, by George B. Torrey, 1937.

Just as the excitement of the McLean acquisition was fading, the Society and Curator’s Office received another inquiry – was there any interest in a large portrait of Charles Evans Hughes? The owner, Mr. Kenneth S. Hughes, was a

descendant of the late Chief Justice who had been given the portrait by a family friend. It had been painted for the New York Lawyer’s Club in 1937, where it had hung until the club closed in the 1970s. After inspection by the curatorial staff, the three-quarters length portrait was donated by Mr. Hughes through the Society in honor of his aunt, none other than Mrs. Elizabeth Hughes Gossett, daughter of Chief Justice Hughes and former Society President. The portrait is similar to the one that Chief Justice Hughes presented to the Court upon his retirement in 1941, also by Torrey, and which hangs above the mantle in the West Conference Room. The portrait is now displayed in the Lower Great Hall near the Visitors Entrance.

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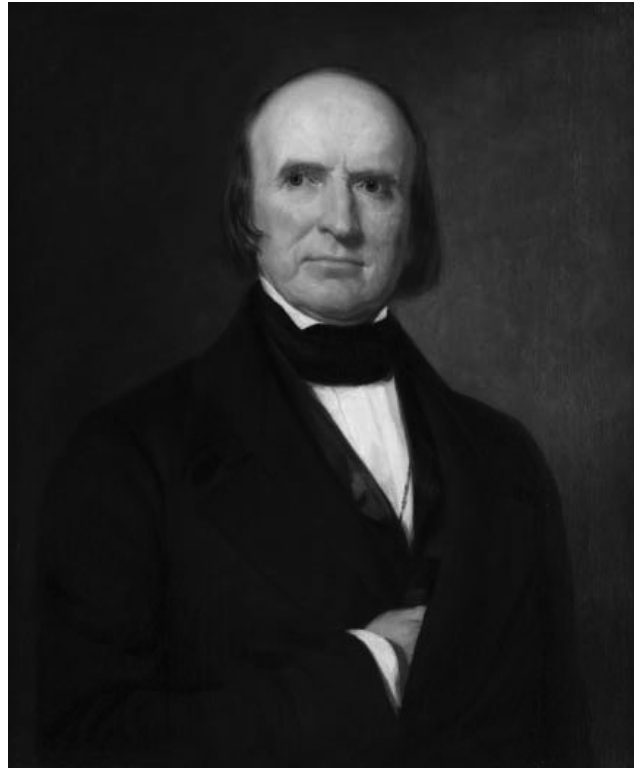
Associate Justice Gabriel Duvall, by an unknown artist, c. 1850.

During the summer of 2011, the Curator was notified of the passing of Dr. William L. Guyton of Cockeysville, Maryland, a 96-year-old World War II veteran and collector of silhouettes. Dr. Guyton’s wife, Mary B. Guyton, was a descendant of Justice Duvall,

and prior to her death in 2003 the couple had agreed to bequeath the portrait to the Supreme Court in memory of her parents, Mr. & Mrs. S. G. Benedict. Justice Duvall served on the Court from 1811 to 1835 and this portrait is noted on the back of the canvas as being “a copy of original in Capitol, Wash.” The location of the original source is not known, but it may have been lost in an 1851 fire in the Library of Congress section of the U.S. Capitol. The bequest also included a framed St. Mémin drawing of Duvall, a late 19th century engraving of the Justice by Rosenthal, and a family coat of arms. These items were exhibited in the Supreme Court Building during the fall of 2011.

Reporter of Decisions William Cranch, by Christopher P. Cranch, c. 1850.

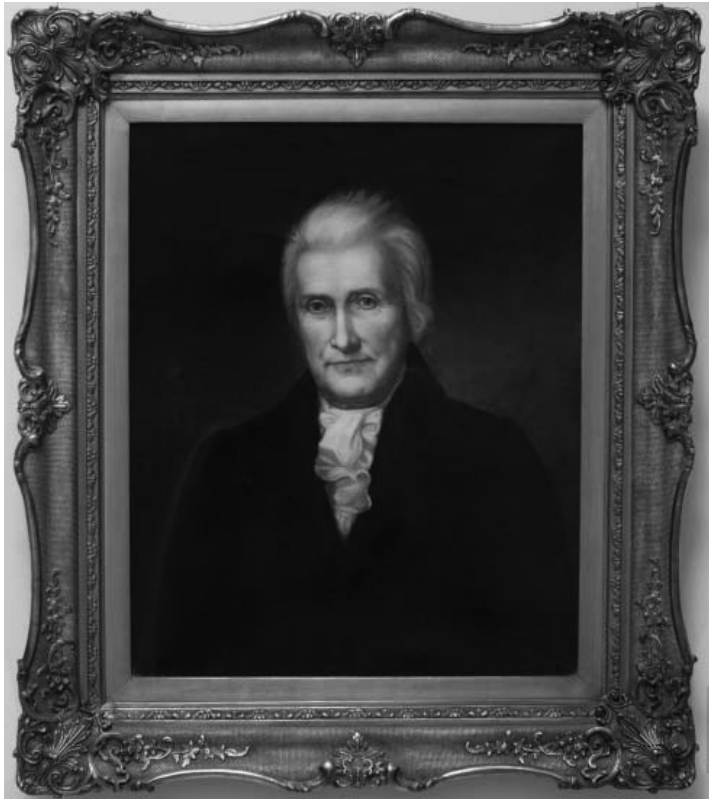
In addition to the three portraits of Justices, 2011 ended with the gift of a portrait of William Cranch, the Court’s second Reporter of Decisions. Cranch served as Reporter from 1801 to 1815, but was also a longtime U.S. Circuit Court Judge for the District of Columbia from 1801 to



All Portraits Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States

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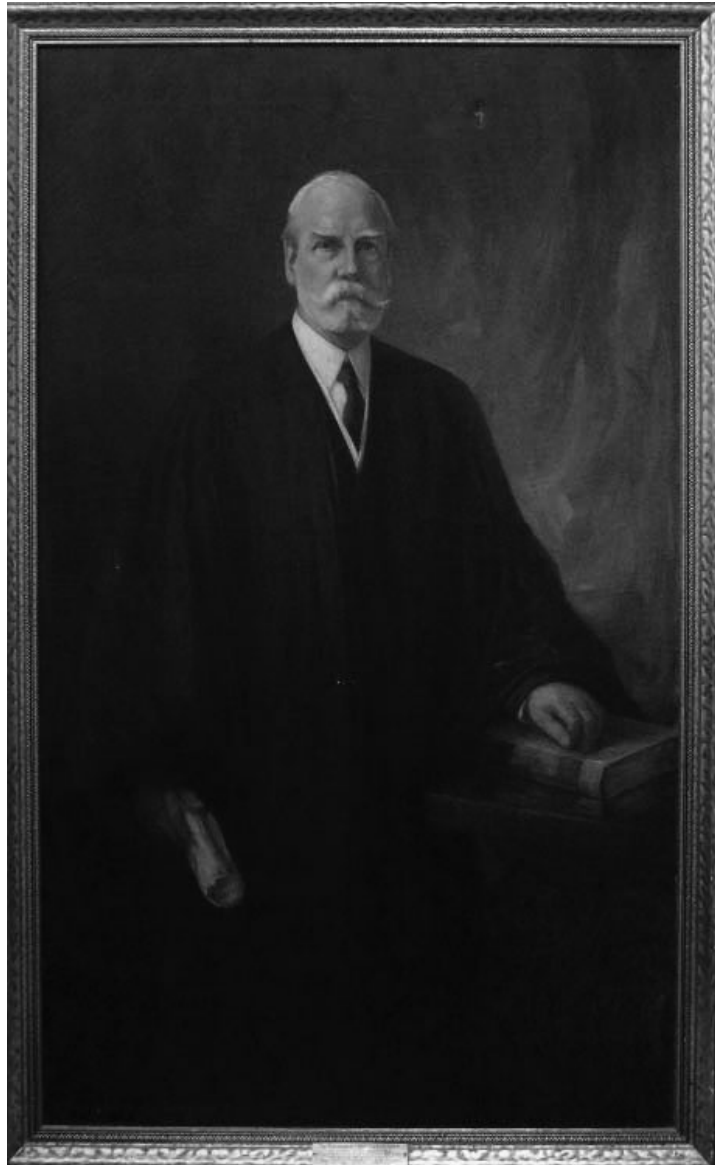
1855. Painted from life by Cranch's son, Christopher Pearse Cranch, the portrait had been inherited by Rev. Thomas E. Korson of Denver, Colorado, from his mother. It had been in the family's home in Amherst, Massachusetts, for many



Associate Justice Gabriel Duvall, by an unknown artist, c. 1850.



Reporter of Decisions William Cranch, by Christopher P. Cranch.



Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, by George B. Torrey, 1937.

years. With the gift, the portrait becomes the second of Judge Cranch in the Court's collection. The first, an 1890 copy portrait showing a different pose, hangs in the Reporter of Decisions' office.

All in all, the Court's collection of portraits now numbers over 200 works. As many of these are copy portraits, the Curator and Society continue to seek period portraits and other works as they become available. Today, only two Justices, Thomas Johnson and Philip P. Barbour, are not represented in the collection. As evidenced by what happened this past year, many portraits are still out there to be located, so if an "Uncle Ralph" is hanging on your wall we hope you will let us know!

Matt Hofstedt may be reached regarding potential donations of portraits or any other historic objects, furniture, or artwork at curator@supremecourt.gov