

A Recent Acquisition: Stanley Matthews and His Wife Mary by Augustus Saint-Gaudens By Matthew Hofstedt, Associate Curator*

Noted American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907) portrayed several Justices over his distinguished career, including the marble bust of Chief Justice Morrison R. Waite on exhibit in the Great Hall of the Supreme Court Building. Recently, the Society acquired one of his other judicial portraits for the Court's collection: a reduction in bronze of a bas-relief depicting Associate Justice Stanley Matthews with his wife Mary.

Justice Matthews served on the Court from 1881 until his death in 1889, but it was not until 1902 that one of his daughters, Jane (Matthews) Gray, commissioned the relief of her parents. Mrs. Gray, the wife of Associate Justice Horace Gray, had come to know Saint-Gaudens while her husband sat for his own bronze relief, a copy of which is already in the Court's collection.

While researching the new piece, the curatorial staff realized that the auction catalog and most Saint-Gaudens references had identified "Mary" as the Justice's second wife, Mary Theaker Matthews. His first wife, however, was also named Mary and she was Jane Gray's mother. It seemed odd that Mrs. Gray would choose to include her step-mother in the relief instead of her birth mother. In addition, accounts of Justice Matthews' second marriage indicated that Mary Theaker was many years his junior but the woman portrayed in the relief looked much closer in age to the Justice.

In an effort to clarify Mary's identity, the staff located correspondence between Saint-Gaudens and Mrs. Gray. In 1902, she wrote to the sculptor requesting that he make two works: a bust of her father and a relief of her parents. Saint-Gaudens, perhaps trying to dissuade her from the endeavor, replied, "You must excuse my tardiness in giving you a definitive reply to your inquiry about the portraits of your father and mother...it is only within the last two days that I have been able to look at the photographs carefully and give the matter the serious consideration it deserved. It is possible to do a bust of your father from the material in hand although I shrink from working from photographs. If you desire however I will try. It is also possible to make a relief of your father and mother but that is an undertaking I shrink from even more than the bust. What I should do if I make the bas-reliefs is to take one of each of the photographs and

confine myself to copying them. I have got to a point in my life where I cannot assume the responsibility of so serious a labor without ample compensation and I think it would be well for you to know before you determine which you will have done that the cost of the bust in marble or bronze would be \$8000.00 (eight thousand dollars) and of the bas-relief of your father and mother twelve thousand (\$12,000.00)."

Mrs. Gray replied,

"I am so glad you are willing to do reliefs of my Father & Mother. The price you put them at does not deter

me as I consider it a filial act and feel that you only could make them what I desire."

Although no bust of Justice Matthews by Saint-Gaudens is known to have been made, he did complete the relief of Justice and Mrs. Matthews. Pleased with the result, Mrs. Gray had several copies made and they were distributed to her brothers and sisters. Over the years, most of these pieces found their way into museum collections, including a full size version in

marble at Matthews' alma mater, Kenyon College, in Gambier, Ohio; a full size copy in bronze at the Cincinnati Museum of Art; and another bronze reduction at the Musée d'Orsay in France.

Acquiring this fine work by Saint-Gaudens for the Court's collection demonstrates the Society's commitment to collecting and preserving objects that help illuminate the history of the Supreme Court for future generations to enjoy.

Editors' Note: The purchase of the bas relief was made possible through generous donations made by Trustees of the Society in response to an appeal from Mr. Joseph. The piece came up for auction and on very short notice it was possible to receive pledges to cover the purchase price of the item. We would like to express gratitude to all of those who stepped forward on short notice to make the purchase of this beautiful piece possible. The piece is now displayed in an exhibit case in the Lower Great Hall of the Supreme Court Building.

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The bas relief of Justice Matthews and his wife Mary by Saint Gaudens was purchased at auction recently.

Collection of the Curator of the Supreme Court of the United States