

CLARENCE S. BRIGHAM (1877-1963), c. 1950
Irving Resnikoff (b. 1897) as 'Charles J. Fox'
oil on canvas
42 1/8 x 35 (106.9975 x 88.9)
signed, l.r.: 'C. J. Fox'
Gift of Clarence S. Brigham, 1950
Hewes Number: 11

Clarence Brigham was a powerful force at the American Antiquarian Society for fifty years. Hired in 1908 as the Society's third librarian, he served in that position until 1930. These were years in which the Society's holdings and resources expanded dramatically. His obituary reports that 'Under Dr. Brigham's direction the Society's library grew from 99,000 volumes in 1908 to 600,000 in 1939, plus half a million manuscripts, maps, newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides, and prints.'¹

Brigham's plan to strengthen the Society's collections came at just the right time, according to Clifford K. Shipton (1902-73), the Society's fifth librarian. 'When Clarence Brigham became librarian of the American Antiquarian Society, it was at a crossroads. Its founders had planned it as a national institution, the leader in its field, but by 1900 it seemed like so many similar organizations, destined to become a social and antiquarian organization of no significance to the scholarly world. It is due to the vision, the foresight, and the vigorous collecting of Clarence Brigham that the institution has become again a primary organization of the nation in its field.'²

¹ 'C.S. Brigham, 86, Librarian, Dead,' New York Times, August 15, 1963, American Antiquarian Society Newsclipping File.

² Clifford K. Shipton quoted in Ivan Sandrof, 'Dean of American Antiquarians,' Worcester Sunday Telegram, January 11, 1959, section F, p. 4.

In 1910 Brigham supervised the move of the collection to its third and current location, organizing wagonloads of books, newspapers, and pamphlets to be taken from the old Lincoln Square building to the new structure on Salisbury Street where he reportedly placed most of the books on the new shelves himself. As librarian and later as director, Brigham also helped plan two stack expansions (in 1924 and), eventually creating over twenty miles of shelving which housed the huge numbers of volumes and printed objects he was acquiring.

In 1930 Brigham added the title of director of the Society and, while continuing to oversee collections, he helped shape the Society's future by raising funds, encouraging scholars, and expanding both the staff and the stacks. His ability to select areas of the collection for expansion was legendary. 'He would take a field in which [Isaiah] Thomas had left us the bare cornerstones, and would buy the largest collection to become available, usually at a time when interest in that field was low. He could then set out to fill the gaps'³ Often Brigham was buying material, such as city directories or annuals that other libraries passed over. 'His genius in selecting fields which were to become popular was amazing.... He recognized fields of potential source material before most of the professionals and was the first to collect them.'⁴

³ Clifford K. Shipton, 'Report of the Council,' Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 73 (1963): 328.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 336.

Brigham's work as an author and bibliographer is reflected in the number of articles, books, and essays he contributed to the scholarly record. He is best known for his monumental bibliographic work, The History and Bibliography of American Newspapers 1690-1820, which was published in 1947 after thirty-four years of research. He recalled, 'When I started in 1913, I blithely believed that five years would finish the job.'⁵ Brigham also published several books on the history of Rhode Island, where he first worked as a librarian after graduating from Brown University in 1899. His publications while at the American Antiquarian Society included his Account of American Almanacs (1925), Paul Revere's Engravings (1954), and Fifty Years of Collecting Americana for the American Antiquarian Society (1958). This last publication serves as an excellent record of his many contributions to the Society's collections, from first editions and graphic arts to children's literature and early engraved American currency.

Brigham served as president of the American Antiquarian Society from 1955 until his retirement in 1959. In 1955 a local journalist dubbed him, 'Mr. American Antiquarian Society' and stated, 'He is one of the greatest of American bibliographers, with a fabulous knowledge of American newspapers, pamphlets, and books. Under his guidance, the American Antiquarian Society has achieved a world-wide reputation.'⁶

⁵ 'C.S. Brigham, 86, Librarian, Dead.' Brigham's notes and correspondence related to the publication of History and Bibliography of American Newspapers 1690-1820 and Paul Revere's Engravings are contained in Clarence Saunders Brigham Papers 1877-1963, American Antiquarian Society's Manuscript Collection.

⁶ 'A Deserved Honor for Clarence Brigham,' Worcester Gazette, October 21, 1955, American Antiquarian Society Newsclipping File.

Brigham gave his portrait to the American Antiquarian Society in 1950, adding his likeness to those of previous librarians and directors of the institution. He commissioned the portrait from a society painter whom he believed was named Charles J. Fox. However, in 1978, court proceedings revealed that, in fact, there was no Charles J. Fox. Leo Fox, an art dealer from Miami and Long Island with impeccable social and political connections, had invented the name and set up Charles J. Fox, Inc., as a way to avoid tax payments. According to a newspaper report, 'Fox says the real artist is Irving Resnikoff, who has never met any of the subjects but paints them from photographs.'⁷ Resnikoff (b. 1897) was a Russian immigrant living in New York City. In his forty-year association with Fox, Resnikoff painted portraits of dozens of government officials, military personnel, and New York businessmen.⁸ The pose, expression, and shadowing of Brigham's portrait exactly matches those in a photograph taken by Boston's Fabian Bachrach, indicating that Brigham submitted the photograph to Fox for his portrait.⁹

⁷ 'Portrait Signature a Hoax?' Worcester Telegram, March 1, 1978. Nine portraits signed by C. J. Fox are listed in Art of the U.S. Capitol, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Printing Office, House Document #91-368, 1976).

⁸ See entries for Brucker, Stahr, and Ailes in William Gardner Bell, Secretaries of War and Secretaries of the Army Portraits of Biographical Sketches (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1992). See also, entries for Dillon and Fowler in the Secretaries of the Treasury Portrait Collection (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of the Treasury, 2000), on-line document at <http://www.treas.gov/curator/secretary/portrait.htm>.

⁹ A copy of Bachrach's photograph is part of the American Antiquarian Society's Graphic Arts Collection.