

sisters, Mrs. Frederick Eyster of Lakeland, Florida, Mrs. M. O. Robinson and Mrs. Minerva Margaret Lowell, both of Dover, Delaware, and several nieces and nephews.

John B. Hench

CHARLES FRANKLIN MONTGOMERY

With the Parthenon shaking, Venice sinking, and civilization appearing to do both, it is probably too much to expect there to be any widespread concern about the fate of the museum profession in American decorative arts. Charles Montgomery, however, cared intensely, and, by a maverick quality in his genius, interested and influenced a whole generation of devoted students to care and enter the field. A tall, strongly built man, senatorial (almost Lincoln-esque) in structure, informal and friendly in style, he was blunt but shrewdly patient as a mentor. He was an excellent teacher, first at Wintertthur Museum and later at Yale University, because he was eager to communicate his own enthusiasms, as well as an immense, affectionate, yet candid knowledge of the American art and antiques scene. His goal in teaching was always achieved by the force and clarity of his thinking, leading to a precision of formulation.

Because of the unevenness of his career and the unconventional route taken to reach the position of professor of the history of art at Yale and curator of the Mabel Brady Garvan and Related Collections of American Art in the Yale Art Gallery, it has been rather difficult to get him into clear focus so as to take his proper measure. At his death he seemed mammoth. He had the great and unexplainable gift of authority—no doubts, no hesitation, what he had to say he said straight out and well and confidently. Students loved him, and had in preparation a small festschrift in his honor when he

died. Quite appropriately for him, he collapsed in the classroom and died shortly thereafter in the Yale–New Haven Hospital on February 21, 1978, at the age of sixty-seven.

Charles Franklin Montgomery was born April 14, 1910, in Austin Township, Illinois, the son of William Norton and Grace Louisa (Albert) Montgomery. Following graduation from high school in Kenney, Illinois, he went 'fresh from a corn farm' to Harvard College and graduated with the class of 1932 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. While taking his entrance exams for Harvard in the fall of 1928, he met a fellow student just back from Europe who 'expounded on the glories of the Old World, then asked when I was there last.' The young freshman from Illinois replied with his own question of when had the young world traveler last been in Chicago—'capital and glory of the midwest'—without confessing that he had never been there himself.

He left college in 1932 and joined the educational and promotional departments of the *Herald Tribune*, and, while working on the road for the newspaper, began to collect antiques. His first purchase was an American-made pewter plate for six dollars. From that early interest in pewter the disease of 'antiquetitis' spread to silver, old pottery, iron and brass hardware, and furniture. He and his first wife, Evelyn Reed, found a colonial house in the rolling hills of Wallingford, Connecticut, in 1937, sold off their pewter collection, and placed a down payment on the weathered, untouched, and very run-down structure with its 150 acres of apple and peach orchards. Life on the farm was appealing, and he succumbed, like most of us, to the agrarian myth: all one needed to do was to prune, spray, harvest, market the fruit, and collect the cash. His first crop was ruined by Connecticut's first hurricane and he was on the verge of bankruptcy. Out of sheer necessity he resigned from the *Tribune* and began to work in earnest at buying and selling antiques out of his home, 'At the Sign of the Tankard,' in Wallingford. He also worked

hard in rebuilding the orchards, from which, 'despite frosts, aphids, red spiders, and scab, my fruit was better each year,' he remembered later. A son, Charles Franklin, Jr., was born in November 1937. By 1944 his young trees bore a magnificent crop of promising fruit and it appeared that all of his losses were about to be recouped. But on the first day of harvest, Connecticut suffered its second hurricane, dumping 20,000 bushels of apples and 5,000 baskets of peaches into the mud. That was the end of his career as an orchardist. Fed up with farming, he sold the orchards the next year and devoted himself exclusively to the study and buying and selling of antiques. These were years of intellectual growth and professional maturity for the bristlingly aggressive young antiques dealer who was developing a voracious appetite for print and sought companionship in bookish things. His zest for life and learning involved a complete commitment to whatever he may have been called on to do.

In October 1946 Charles married Florence Elizabeth Melowes, his equal in intellect and his helpmate in his career. She had trained at the Fogg Museum and held positions at the Rhode Island School of Design and the Metropolitan Museum of Art before their marriage; for years they were to work 'closely and happily together as a team,' in his words, on many research projects. To the Montgomerys a son, William Phelps, was born in August 1948 and a daughter, Agnes Nisbet, in January 1950. Charles was a man of deep private affections, for whom marriage and children were an abiding happiness and the accidental death in 1955 of Agnes, his only daughter, an enduring grief.

In January 1949 the Montgomerys moved to Delaware to work with Joseph Downs in cataloguing Henry Francis du Pont's immense private collection of American antiques. Mr. du Pont's house was opened as a public museum, Winterthur, in 1951 and Charles was named its executive secretary and associate curator. In 1952 he instituted the graduate Winter-

thur Program in Early American Culture in cooperation with the University of Delaware. He raised the money for all of the early fellowship grants personally and now, after nearly two hundred graduates, the program is over a quarter of a century old. Having been in the fourth class of fellows, I am without question prejudiced in my point of view, but I feel strongly that this dream which he brought to reality will stand as one of the greatest monuments to his memory. Its impact on the intellectual, artistic, historical, and cultural community of America has not yet been fully felt or appreciated.

Upon the death of Downs in 1954, Charles was named director of the museum and served until 1960 when a coronary forced him to move from administration to research at Winterthur and lecturing at the university. In 1965 he lectured for a semester at the University of Pennsylvania, and in 1966 brought out his magnum opus, *American Furniture: The Federal Period*, based on the Winterthur collection. He wrote of these years in retrospect in his twenty-fifth anniversary report at Harvard:

As I look back on these years they seem deeply rewarding ones. At Winterthur we have developed an active research and teaching program using the Museum as a laboratory for the study of American arts, life, and living during the early and formative years of our country. As this analysis continues toward a more discerning view of the American and his culture, it becomes increasingly evident to me that art belongs not to the periphery, but to the center of life and is a key expression of life. I now see art not as a self-indulgence of wealthy patrons, or as a dispensable diversion, not as an end in itself, but as a necessary language for the human spirit. The consequence is increasingly clear; we can fully know a people only if we know its art, for art reveals the very spirit of a people. An understanding of our arts is essential to a comprehension of our history.

He carried this lofty vision of the arts in American society to Yale in 1970, where he became a professor of art history

and curator of the Garvan collection. He discovered the fresh excitement of teaching bright undergraduates and felt somewhat like an expatriate breaking through the constricting intellectualism of museum bureaucracies and graduate school coteries. There he staged innovative exhibitions and developed experimental ways of teaching the arts. In 1973 he published *A History of American Pewter* and in 1976 staged a remarkable bicentennial exhibition, 'American Art, 1750-1800: Towards Independence,' which opened at Yale and traveled to the Victoria and Albert Museum, where it demonstrated to the English the high level of achievement in all of the American arts at the time of the American Revolution. A significant catalogue of that exhibition by the same name was published.

Charles was elected to the American Antiquarian Society in October 1958. Although he attended only one meeting he held AAS in high esteem. He frequently contributed to appeals for annual funds and gave a copy of his *American Furniture* in a presentation binding to the library. He carried on a lengthy correspondence with Clarence Brigham, a fellow member of the Walpole Society, about Hurd and Revere bookplates. He was elected to the Walpole Society in 1955 and served as its secretary for a number of years. Some of my fondest memories of him are of him at these biannual meetings.

Charles was on the verge of retirement when he died, but he was still driving hard on many projects and many things were left undone to which he had set his hand; but at least he never had to grow old.

Wendell D. Garrett

MARY GAGE RICE

Mary Gage Rice, who died November 23, 1977, at the age of seventy-five, belonged to a high tradition of New England

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.