

Obituaries

CHARLES H. SAWYER

The art historian and pioneering art director Charles Sawyer died on February 25, 2005, at ninety-eight years of age. Long active in the art world, Charlie, as he was affectionately called, was still giving art museum tours to his fellow senior citizens just weeks before his death. His entire life was devoted to art, education, and public service. One of the longest-serving members of the American Antiquarian Society, he was elected to the Society in 1946.

Charles Sawyer was born on October 20, 1906, in Andover, Massachusetts, where he graduated from Phillips Academy. He earned his bachelor's degree from Yale University in 1929. He then studied pre-law at Harvard University, taking no additional degree, although a class with the legendary teacher and museum director Paul Sachs inspired him to pursue art history. By 1930, the twenty-three-year-old Sawyer was invited to become the first curator of the Addison Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy. There he was made director and distinguished himself as a specialist in art education while building an important collection of American art. He is credited with having recognized early on the talent of many twentieth-century artists, including John Sloan, Edward Hopper, and Maurice and Charles Prendergast.

In 1940 Sawyer was appointed director of the Worcester Art Museum, where his career was interrupted by three years of war service (1943-46), mainly for the Office of Strategic Services, then the United States intelligence-gathering agency. His job was to help document and retrieve works of art confiscated by the Nazis.

While he served a total of only four years at Worcester, Sawyer managed to leave his mark. Under him, the museum devoted a gallery to Pre-Columbian art, becoming a leader in the exhibition of these objects as works of art. Sawyer was also instrumental in giving greater recognition to New England handicrafts.

Sawyer returned to his alma mater, Yale University, in 1947 to become the director of the Division of the Arts, overseeing the colleges of Architecture, Art and Drama, the Art Gallery and the Department of History of Art. Sawyer was the first to occupy this post, which was designed to elevate the role of the arts at the university. Under his directorship, the Yale University Art Gallery added a major wing designed by Louis Kahn.

In 1957 Sawyer became the second director of the University of Michigan Museum of Art and a member of the university faculty. There he established a program in museum practice to train students seeking museum careers, one of the first of its kind in the country. In recognition of his pioneering effort, the University of Michigan Museum of Art recently announced the creation of the Charles Sawyer Center for Museum Studies as part of the its building expansion project. At Michigan, Sawyer continued to demonstrate his ability to discern important movements in contemporary art, exhibiting and defending Pop Art as early as 1963.

Following his retirement in 1972, Sawyer served as a member of the Smithsonian Art Commission until 1982. He was also involved in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Century Association, and the Association of Art Museum Directors. As a scholar of American art, he was particularly interested in the activities of the American Antiquarian Society and participated in many of the Society's tours and events.

Charlie's wife, Katharine (Kitty) Clay Sawyer, whom he married in 1934, was his life-long, devoted partner, who played an active role in his professional career. She served on the museum staff at both Andover and Worcester and was always at Charlie's side performing the role of an extremely lively hostess to generations of students, faculty, alumni, and the general public.

Throughout his life Charlie Sawyer witnessed dramatic changes in the fields he was most devoted to: education, art museums, and American art. In all three he was not only a pioneer but a stabilizing force, preparing subsequent generations for leadership roles in these fields. His colleagues always regarded him as one of the most consistent, thoughtful and kind individuals. The ultimate New England gentleman, he was forever modest about his many accomplishments. Yet, he rightly took his greatest personal pride in having trained numerous individuals for museum careers. Thanks to his generous and caring nature, his wonderful spirit lives on through the work of these countless individuals who were so fortunate to have had him as a mentor.

James A. Welu

KATHRYN CONWAY PREYER

Kathryn 'Kitty' Preyer died on April 19, 2005, at her home in Lexington, Massachusetts, after a courageous battle with cancer. She was eighty years old. She fought valiantly to the end but, characteristically, spent most of her waning energy worrying about those she loved. She is survived by her family: her husband of thirty-nine years, Robert Otto 'Bob' Preyer, professor emeritus at Brandeis University; her brother Henry I. Conway, Jr., and her sister, Mary Patricia Conway, both of Baltimore, Maryland, where Kitty was born. She had three stepdaughters, one niece, two nephews, four grandchildren, one great-grandchild, four grandnieces and four grandnephews. She is deeply mourned by all those who had the great good fortune to have known her.

In 1996 Kitty was asked by the American Antiquarian Society to write an obituary for the great American historian Merle Curti, her mentor at the University of Wisconsin where she received her Ph.D. in history in 1959. She noted then how 'difficult' it was to

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