

# Jonathan Sturges, W. H. Osborn, and William Church Osborn: A Chapter in American Art Patronage

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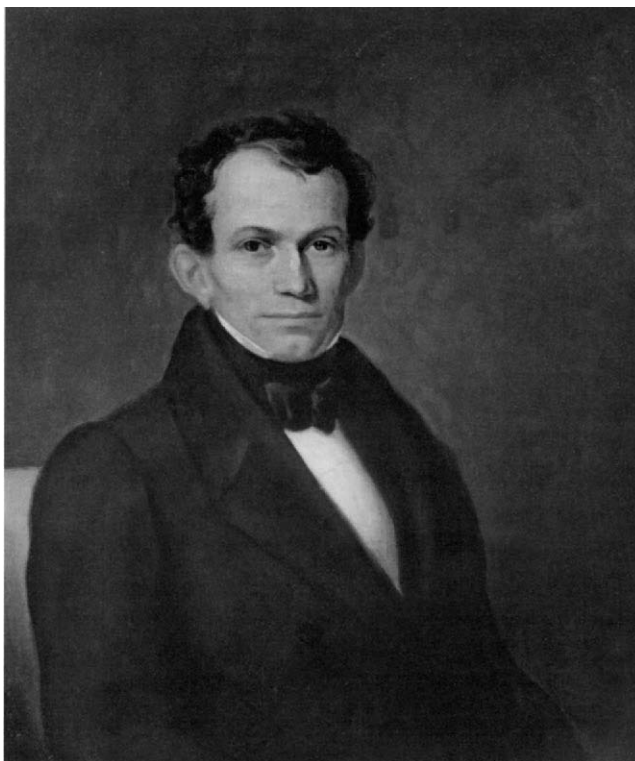
The history of the establishment of art museums in the United States is one in which private collectors and businessmen joined together to present art as a refining and educating influence for the public. By 1870, when The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded, the educational value of museums was a prime concern for the young nation, which suffered from a cultural inferiority complex despite the industrial and financial prominence it had attained.<sup>1</sup> There was much talk in the popular media about the federal government's failure to establish nationally supported museums comparable to the Louvre in Paris and the National Gallery in London. The early history of American art museums was indeed quite different from that of European art institutions, reflecting the characteristic American spirit of private entrepreneurship. In the decades after the Metropolitan Museum opened to the public in 1872,<sup>2</sup> gifts and purchases of ancient art and European and American fine and decorative arts from the collections of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Collis P. Huntington, and J. Pierpont Morgan, among many, brought the institution international recognition. With the recent resurgence of interest in the history of collecting and patronage, the time is ripe for sharing the story of three generations of patrons and collectors who played significant roles in the Museum's history: Jonathan Sturges, his son-in-law William Henry (W. H.) Osborn, and Sturges's grandson William Church Osborn.

Years ago, while hunting for Thomas Cole's (1801–1848) lost unfinished series *The Cross and the World*, I noticed that W. H. Osborn, the supposed owner of at least one of the paintings, was married to Virginia Reed Sturges, Jonathan's eldest child. This article represents my first attempt to share excerpts from unpublished diaries, letters, and photographs that chronicle the lives and art patronage of the Sturges and Osborn families. The families were distinguished not only by their benevolence to artists but by their quiet support of a range of public causes.

Although the merchant Jonathan Sturges (1802–1874; Figure 1) is little known today, his art collection was listed in Henry T. Tuckerman's seminal *Book of the Artists* (1867)

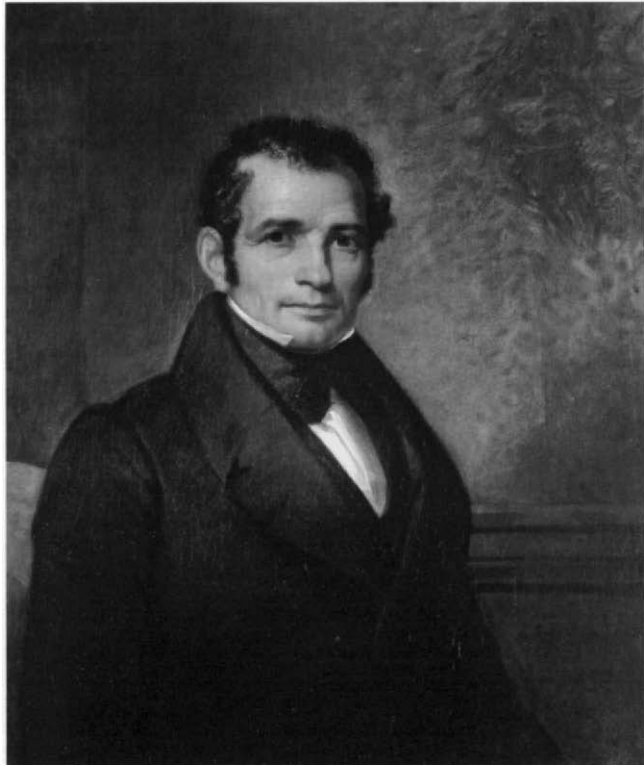
as one of ten noteworthy private collections in New York City.<sup>3</sup> In 2005 the New York Public Library sold one of its greatest treasures, Asher B. Durand's (1796–1886) *Kindred Spirits* (1849; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas), an iconic painting that communicates in dramatic terms the relationship between Cole and the poet William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878), between painting and literature, between art and nature, and between nature and spirituality. Many who mourn this loss to New York's cultural heritage do not know that it was Sturges who commissioned the painting as a gift to Bryant, in tribute to his masterful funeral oration for Cole.

Born in Southport, Connecticut, Sturges spent much of his childhood in nearby Fairfield. Although he was descended from a distinguished and well-to-do family (his grandfather,

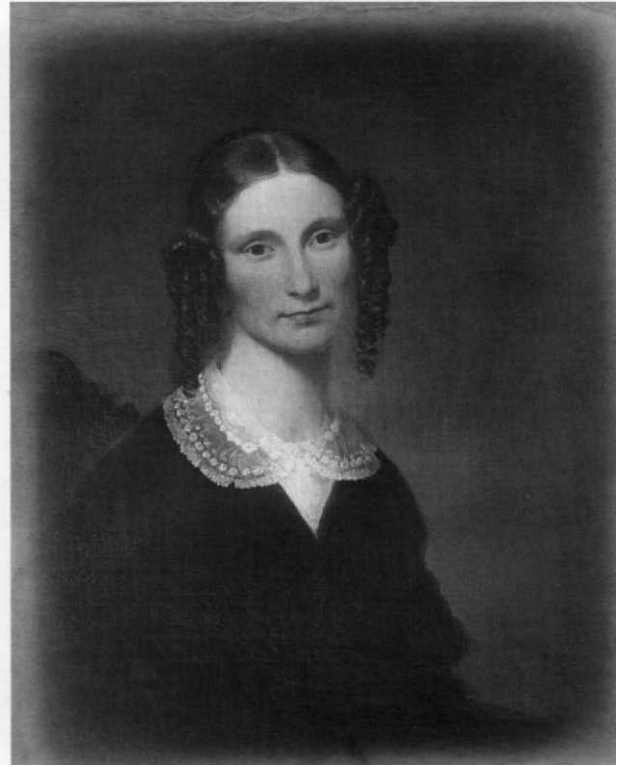


1. Asher B. Durand (American, 1796–1886). *Jonathan Sturges*, ca. 1836–37. Oil on canvas, 30½ x 25 in. (77.5 x 63.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Frederick Sturges, Jr., 1977 (1977.342.1)

2. Asher B. Durand. *Luman Reed*, 1835. Oil on canvas, 30 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 25 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (76.5 x 64.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Mary Fuller Wilson, 1962 (63.36)



3. Charles C. Ingham (American, born Ireland, 1796–1863) or Daniel Huntington (American, 1816–1906). *Mary Pemberton Cady Sturges*. Private collection



a Yale-educated lawyer, represented Connecticut as a delegate to the Continental Congress and was a member of the United States House of Representatives), his father had lost his share of the family fortune in a failed business venture, so Jonathan was obliged to go to work to help support the family. In 1821 he left for New York City and, so the story goes, knocked on the door of R. and L. Reed, wholesale grocers, at 125 Front Street, seeking employment. Told that no vacancies existed, Sturges promptly reported next door and again rapped, not knowing that the firm occupied both buildings. Luman Reed (1785–1836; Figure 2) was impressed by Sturges's youthful perseverance and hired him as a clerk.<sup>4</sup> In 1828 Reed rewarded the energetic young man by making him a partner in the firm, then renamed Reed and Sturges.<sup>5</sup> After Reed's death Sturges became the senior partner, remaining with the firm until his retirement in 1867 and attaining a prominent position in the New York business world.<sup>6</sup> Sturges and his wife, Mary Pemberton Cady (1806–1894; Figure 3), became personal friends of the Reeds, and Sturges learned of his mentor's interest in art and his developing friendships with Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, and William Sidney Mount (1807–1868), as well as the painter George Whiting Flagg (1816–1897). These cordial relationships would be curtailed by Reed's sudden death after only six years of collecting, yet in that brief period he became a close friend of Cole, Durand, and Mount, and the financial mainstay of Cole and Durand. In 1834 Reed unveiled the art gallery he had built on the top floor of his new home on

Greenwich Street, in lower Manhattan. There William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, Samuel F. B. Morse, Cole, Durand, Mount, other cultural and political figures, and leaders in business gathered to enjoy the collection and share the news of the day. This lively atmosphere was replicated by the Sturges family, who were known for their musical evenings. In 1863 Arthur Sturges, Jonathan's son, described such an evening in his pocket diary:

Mr. [Louis Moreau] Gottschalk came to play for us to night, and among the company assembled to hear him were Gen. McClellan, Mr. Church and Mr. Durand. . . . Just after supper Mr. C pointed to an old monk's head in the dining room, and asked who the painter was. On hearing that it was a copy from Titian by Durand he said, "Ah I see a repetition (Titian)." Gottschalk appeared to be very pleasant and intelligent.<sup>7</sup>

Mary Sturges's 1894 obituary provides more detail about the family's hospitality:

From her marriage to Mr. Sturges in 1828 she became identified with the best social life here. Their home . . . was the headquarters of the Sketch Club. She entertained the art and literary celebrities of the day there. Bryant, [Washington] Irving, and [Nathaniel Parker] Willis were among her friends. . . . Her husband's prominence as a merchant brought public men to their home. She knew nearly all the

Presidents. Clay, Webster, and Calhoun enjoyed her hospitality. In later years her guests included Grant, McClellan, Sherman, Burnside, Hancock, and Farragut.<sup>8</sup>

We can be fairly certain that Reed inspired Sturges to join the city's artistic and literary circles. This involvement had already begun by the early 1820s, when Sturges viewed John Vanderlyn's panorama *The Palace and Gardens of Versailles* (Metropolitan Museum) and his *Ariadne* (New-York Historical Society) on public display at the Rotunda in City Hall Park.<sup>9</sup> The first reference to Sturges as a patron and collector is found in Reed's correspondence. In June 1835 Reed, accompanied by his son-in-law Theodore Allen, traveled to Boston with Durand, whom he had commissioned to paint John Quincy Adams and copy Gilbert Stuart's (1755–1828) portraits of John Adams and of George and Martha Washington that were displayed at the Boston Athenaeum. On June 4 Reed reported Durand's progress to Sturges:

Durand has had a sitting of Mr. Adams to day & goes again on Saturday, he feels very confident of getting a better likeness than the first one. I communicated your Message to him & it will be a pleasing undertaking to him to paint your little Boy & Virginia also if you wish it.<sup>10</sup>

The resulting double portrait of Virginia and Frederick Sturges is still owned by the family. Well satisfied with Durand's work, Sturges commissioned him to paint a second portrait, this time of his younger children Amelia and Edward, as well as portraits of himself and Reed, sympathetic likenesses that were later donated to the Metropolitan (see Figures 1 and 2). Sturges encouraged Durand's transition from portraiture to landscape painting, in 1836 giving him his first commission for a landscape, *View near Saugerties* (collection of William and Anne Jacobi).<sup>11</sup> The two embarked on a singularly close and long-lasting relationship.

It is striking that the Sturges collection was composed of contemporary American art that was mostly purchased from the artists.<sup>12</sup> At the time, many American collectors were focused on European old master art, much of it spurious. Just coming into fashion were artists trained in the precise and sentimental style of the Düsseldorf school, such as the German American Emanuel Leutze (1816–1868) and the American Worthington Whittredge (1820–1910). In the decades before commercial art galleries were established in New York, one could acquire contemporary American art only at the National Academy of Design, through the American Art-Union, and through auctions of private collections.<sup>13</sup> Sturges provided several artists with much-needed financial and moral support. He continued Reed's close relationships with Durand, Cole, and Mount, also

extending friendship and patronage to Henry Peters Gray (1819–1877), Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900), John Gadsby Chapman (1808–1889), Henry Kirke Brown (1814–1886), Francis W. Edmonds (1806–1863), Henry Inman (1801–1846), Robert W. Weir (1803–1889), Daniel Huntington (1816–1906), and Charles C. Ingham (1796–1863), among others. Sturges helped many of them early in their careers and, like Reed, felt a sense of pride in the role he played in helping to shape a homegrown American art.

When Reed died, Cole was in the middle of an important commission for him, the famous five-painting series *The Course of Empire* (1834–36, New-York Historical Society). Cole, who had perennial money troubles and was counting on this lucrative commission, wondered if the Reed family would honor the agreement but did not know how to bring up the delicate subject. Sturges interceded for him with the Reeds, ensuring that the order was honored. Sturges himself also commissioned a major painting from Cole, *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn* (Figure 4), one of the masterpieces of the Metropolitan's nineteenth-century American art collection. A recently discovered letter from artist to patron, written in February 1837, discusses the commission, emphasizing the warm feelings shared by Cole, Sturges, and Reed while lamenting the despoliation of the region's natural splendor:

I was gratified to learn that you anticipate [the] completion [of your painting] with such interest—I assure you that the fact of yourself being always associated with the memory of Mr. Reed will not diminish my efforts to make the picture worthy of the friend of that noble friend—The picture is an American View, which I believe you desired, & it is the richest I have been able to select—It is a view

4. Thomas Cole (American, born England, 1801–1848), *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn*, 1837. Oil on canvas, 39 x 63 in. (99.1 x 160 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift in memory of Jonathan Sturges by his children, 1895 (95.13.3)





5. Asher B. Durand. *In the Woods*, 1855. Oil on canvas, 60¾ x 48 in. (154.3 x 121.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift in memory of Jonathan Sturges by his children, 1895 (95.13.1)



for Durand, who was to repay him with paintings. Sturges asked only that he

write to me as often as you can giving me an account of the galleries and pictures you see, and what you are doing, and any other information you think will interest me. If you paint any pictures send them to me if you can before you return—do not sacrifice any time that can be more fully employed to paint for me. I leave it to you what to paint.<sup>16</sup>

Sturges was arguably Durand's most generous patron, acquiring as many as thirty paintings and making additional purchases for family and friends. Durand became a close friend and frequent visitor to the Sturges homes in New York City and Fairfield, Connecticut, and Sturges employed Durand's son John in his business.<sup>17</sup>

Sturges commissioned three of Durand's most famous paintings, two of which were donated by family descendants to the Metropolitan. One, *In the Woods* (Figure 5), is still considered a masterwork.<sup>18</sup> Sturges was so pleased with this canvas that two years after its purchase in 1855 he sent the artist a bonus, remarking "enclosed please find check for Two hundred Dollars which I desire to add to the price

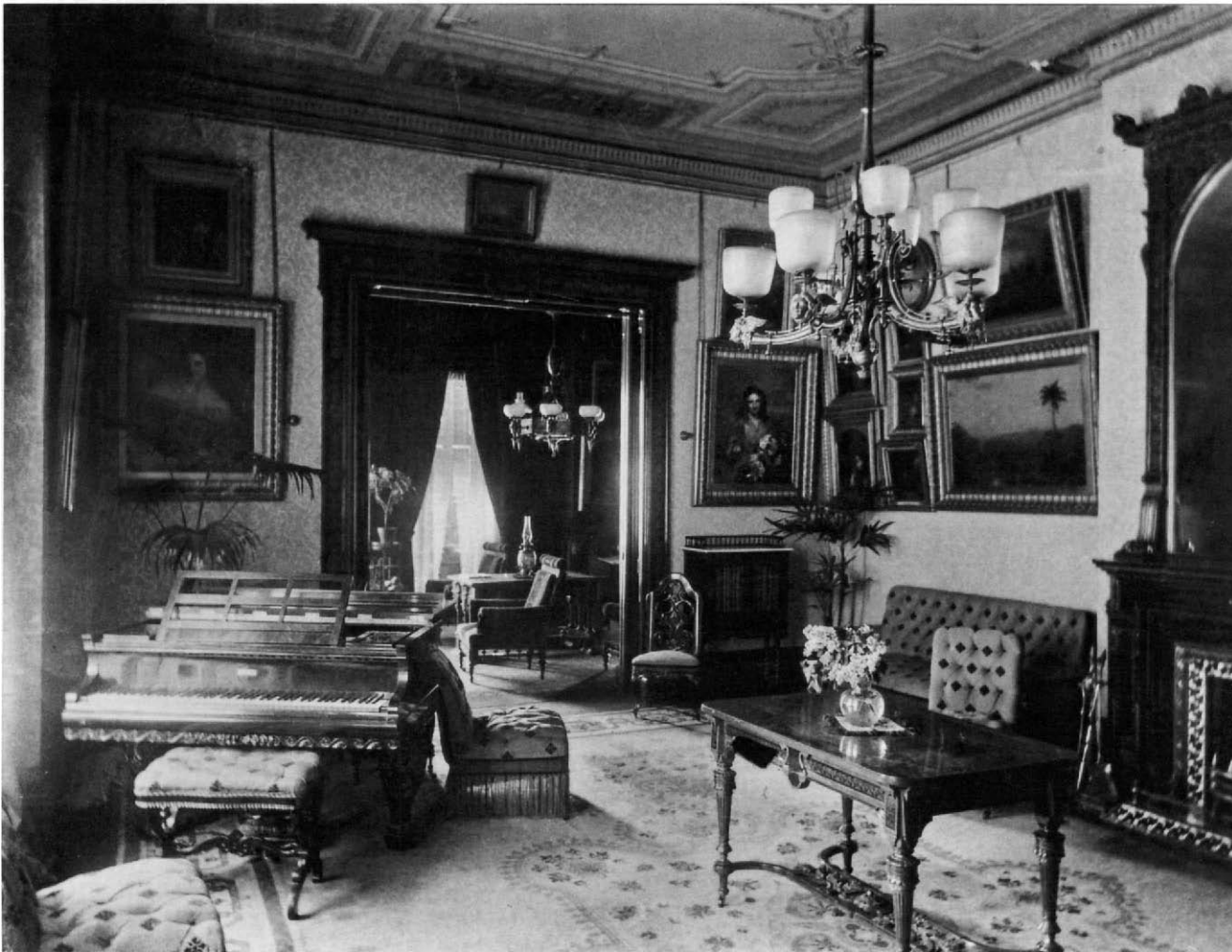
in the valley of the Catskill near this place. Mr. Reed and myself have several times together gazed on the scene & with mutual delight. The vicinity of the site from which the view is taken was a favourite haunt of mine—but its beauty has passed away—the same season that took away Mr. Reed found the valley desolate & the magnificent woods had all been felled—I take a pleasure in thinking that my picture may for years to come—tell what the Valley of the Catskill was before what is called "improvement" blasted the scene—I hope you will not anticipate too much in this picture—remember it is a view & it is impossible to introduce in a view the richness of composition & variety of objects that can be clustered together in a composition.<sup>14</sup>

After Cole's death in 1848, Sturges was one of eleven organizers of the Thomas Cole memorial exhibition, to which he loaned three paintings: *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn*; *Mill Dam on the Catskill Creek* (1841, Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire); and *View on the Thames, England* (1844–45, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).<sup>15</sup> It is also likely that Sturges at least partly financed Louis Legrand Noble's *Life and Works of Thomas Cole* (1857).

Following the example of Reed, who invited the young George Whiting Flagg to travel to Europe in 1834 and study the old masters, Sturges sponsored a year abroad in 1840–41



6. Charles C. Ingham. *The Flower Girl*, 1846. Oil on canvas, 36 x 28¾ in. (91.4 x 72.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of William Church Osborn, 1902 (02.7.1)



7. Interior of the Jonathan Sturges home, Fourteenth Street, New York, showing Figure 6, after 1890. Osborn Family Archives. Photograph: George G. Rockwood

of the wood picture. The trees have grown more than two hundred dollars worth since 1854 [sic]."<sup>19</sup> *In the Woods* was Sturges's sole contribution to the 1867 Paris Exposition Universelle.<sup>20</sup>

Evidence of the patron's close relationships with Church, Chapman, Huntington, and Gray may be gleaned from letters and diaries and from Sturges's account book. In 1845 he listed two payments to Gray of \$100 each, on account, but we do not know if the painting in question was completed or, if so, what it was.<sup>21</sup> By the mid-1850s, Sturges certainly owned two paintings by Gray: *Proserpine and Bacchus* (whereabouts unknown) and *Young Poetess* (private collection). Both men were deeply involved with the National Academy of Design: Gray was vice-president and in the early 1860s served as chairman of the building committee, on which Sturges worked closely.

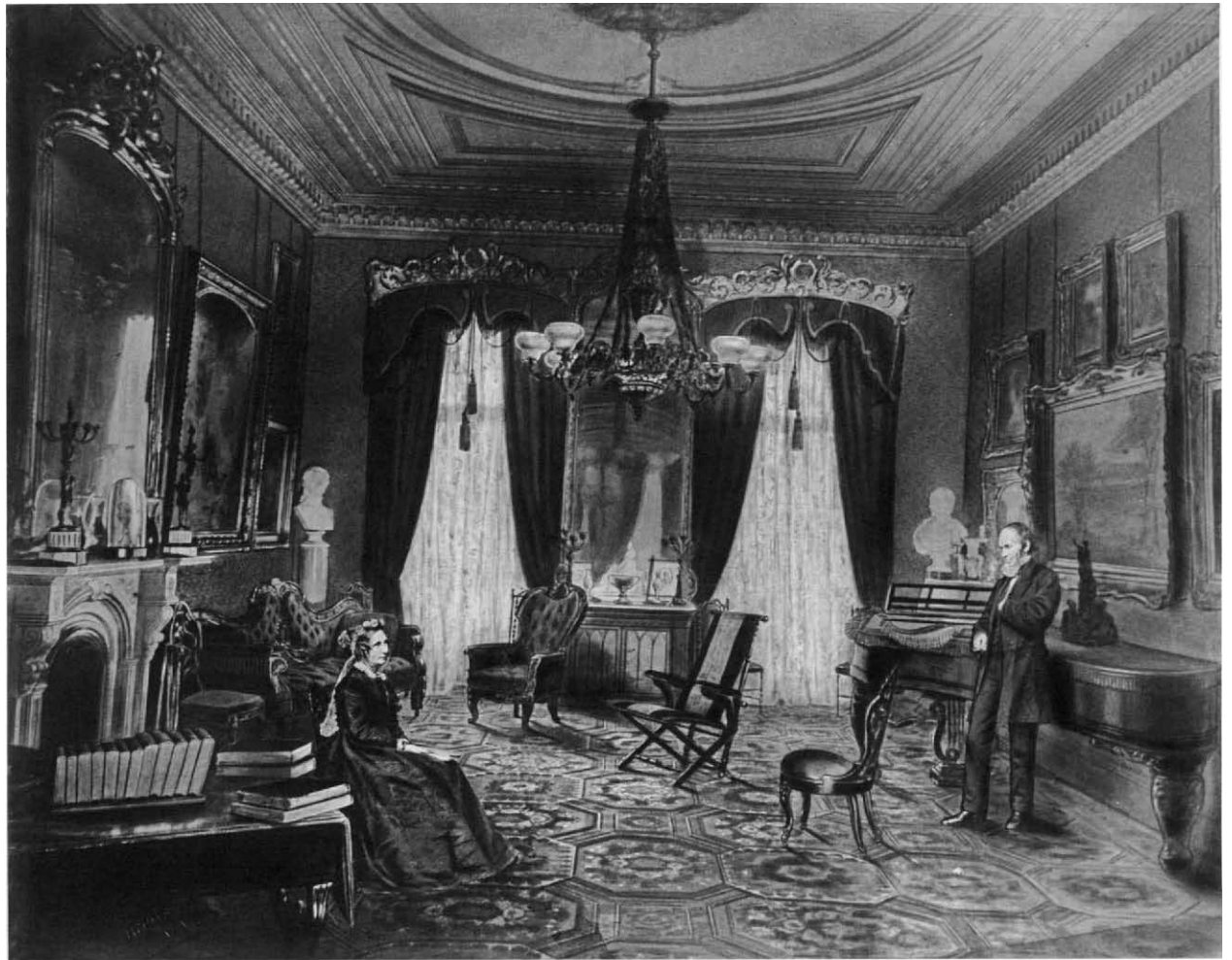
Another friend was Charles C. Ingham, founder of the Sketch Club and president of the National Academy of Design. In the 1840s he was chairman of the Academy's building committee for the 663 Broadway building project, while Sturges and his fellow businessman and art patron Charles M. Leupp were the principal financial backers.<sup>22</sup>

Sturges owned Ingham's *Flower Girl* (Figure 6), a striking composition whose vivid colors and varieties of flowers present a still life within a genre painting. John Durand recorded his father's opinion of the painting:

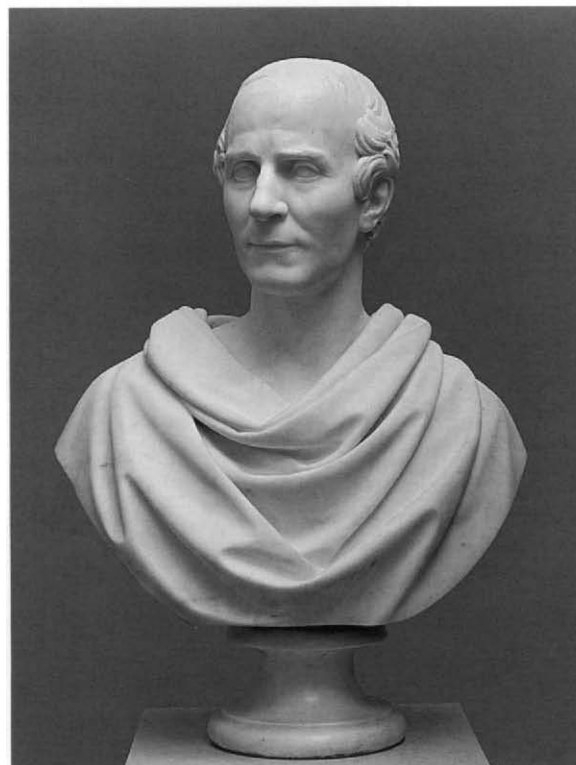
Seldom have I heard Father speak so much of a picture as one new painting by Ingham in which Flowers are very prominent. They are beautifully exquisitely painted. Almost beat the Dutch in, but there is more sentiment in his picture. Mr. Sturges has secured it [for] (\$500)[.] Mr. I has been employed all summer in it. . . . Father does not think it a high order of picture but admirable of its kind & unequalled or unsurpassed rather.<sup>23</sup>

We know from his account book that Sturges bought *The Flower Girl* directly from Ingham, making three payments in December 1846.<sup>24</sup> Ingham borrowed the picture back for the 1847 exhibition at the National Academy of Design, the showcase for artists' best work, and today it is considered a masterwork of Victorian painting.<sup>25</sup> A photograph of the interior of Sturges's New York home shows the painting on view (Figure 7).<sup>26</sup>

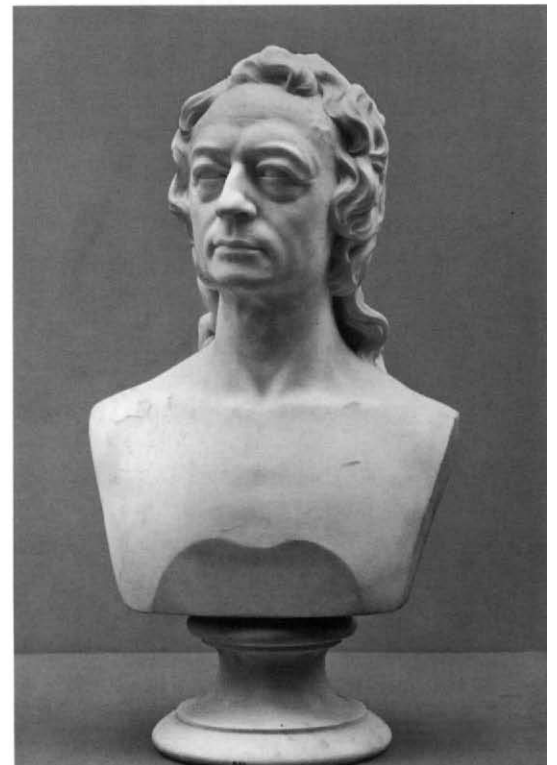
8. Parlor of the Sturges home, Fourteenth Street, New York, before 1874, showing Figures 4, 9, and 10 on view. Photographic composition with additional drawing. Osborn Family Archives



9. Henry Kirke Brown (American, 1814–1886). *Thomas Cole*, 1848. Marble, 28 x 18 x 12 in. (71.1 x 45.7 x 30.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift in memory of Jonathan Sturges, by his children, 1895 (95.8.1)



10. Edward Augustus Brackett (American, 1818–1908). *Washington Allston*, 1843–44. Marble, 26¾ x 14¼ x 9 in. (67.9 x 36.2 x 22.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift in memory of Jonathan Sturges, by his children, 1895 (95.8.2)





In another family pictorial record (Figure 8) two marble portrait busts, *Thomas Cole*, by Henry Kirke Brown, and *Washington Allston*, by Edward Augustus Brackett (Figures 9 and 10), are displayed in the Sturges home on Fourteenth Street, near Fifth Avenue. Both sculptures, posthumous likenesses, were presented to the Metropolitan. The landscape in the place of honor behind Jonathan Sturges is Cole's *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn* (see Figure 4). Entries in Sturges's account book inform us that he commissioned the Cole bust from Brown in 1848 at a cost of \$500.<sup>27</sup> We do not know how Sturges acquired the Allston bust, but he owned it by 1850, when he lent it to the National Academy. There is no evidence of a relationship between Brackett and Sturges, but the artist was friendly with William Cullen Bryant, who could have introduced them.

Inspired by his close relationship with Luman Reed and his growing interest in American art and artists, in 1844 Sturges collaborated with Reed's son-in-law Theodore Allen in founding the New-York Gallery of the Fine Arts, the city's first public art museum, to preserve and exhibit Reed's collection. Sturges, the gallery's president, backed the financially strapped organization for more than a decade. He also approached several artists for donations to supplement the collection; Durand, Cole, Mount, and Ingham, out of regard for Reed and Sturges, donated important works.<sup>28</sup> Once the collection was transferred to the New-York Historical Society, Sturges became an active and generous member. At the National Academy of Design, in recognition of his exemplary support and personal dedication, Sturges was elected an honorary member, amateur status—a distinction he shared with a select few, including Reed and his two sons-in-law. Following the successful close of the 1863 building campaign, the Academy honored Sturges by commissioning his portrait for the permanent collection, and Sturges chose Durand for the task.<sup>29</sup> The honoree responded to this recognition with characteristic humility:

I cannot consent that the Academy should feel under any obligations to me. I have been doubly compensated for all I have done by the pleasant intercourse I have so long been permitted to enjoy with so many of its members. I can truly say that my connections with Art and Artists has [*sic*] been a source of great profit to myself and family in the refining influences it has had upon us all, for many many years.<sup>30</sup>

At Sturges's death, the Academy's Council recognized him as a friend who had aided them "with generous hand, true sympathy and cultivated taste," adding that "to no other lay members are we more generously and gratefully indebted."<sup>31</sup>

Sturges was also active in both the Sketch Club (or XXI) and the Century Association. He was a founding member of

the Sketch Club, established in 1827 as a social club by Ingham, Bryant, and other artists, writers, and patrons of the arts. Since the membership was limited to twenty-one, the Century Association was created in 1847 as a larger offshoot; Sturges was one of its founders and a lifelong member. In a diary from the 1840s, John Durand described a meeting of the Sketch Club attended by the artists Brown, Gray, Huntington, and Thomas Seir Cummings and the patrons Sturges, Leupp, Gulian C. Verplanck, David C. Colden, and John Neilson, among others:

[O]ver a glass of whiskey punch [they] sat down to tell stories, conundrums, and whatever else the moment might suggest. Mr. Brown proposed a project for naturalizing a costume wherewith to clothe our heros [*sic*] both in sculpture and in painting... [for] the difficulty of clothing statues is so great, as to render something like this plan absolutely necessary, it will not answer to cut a naked figure, or clad always with the eternal toga, making Romans instead of Americans."<sup>32</sup>

Although Sturges was not among the founders of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, he was involved at first with its planning and then bowed out, probably owing to encroaching age and infirmity. Early discussions about the formation of a major fine-art museum in New York City took place in meetings of the art committee of the Union League Club, established in 1863 by a group of New Yorkers, including Sturges, who supported the Union and opposed slavery.<sup>33</sup> The club began to build an art collection and mounted a series of noteworthy exhibitions of contemporary and historical art. In 1864 the Union League was instrumental in organizing the Metropolitan Fair, a benefit for the United States Sanitary Commission.<sup>34</sup> Both Mary Sturges and her daughter Virginia Osborn were prime movers in assembling the art exhibition that was the largest and most popular feature of the fair.<sup>35</sup> Sturges loaned two paintings and helped to gather works of art and other items for exhibition and sale.

In 1869 Sturges was among those appointed to a provisional committee tasked with drafting a charter, constitution, and bylaws for the new museum. He was also present at John Taylor Johnston's home in 1870, when fundraising for the institution was discussed by leading businessmen and artists and a subscription list was drafted.<sup>36</sup> Although his friends William Cullen Bryant, Daniel Huntington, Frederic E. Church, and John F. Kensett were among the founders, Sturges wrote Durand on March 19, "This winter I am obliged to keep pretty close, I have not been out in nearly two weeks. I do not see so much of our Artist friends, not being able to go to the Century."<sup>37</sup> He was growing old, deferring to a new generation to carry the torch.<sup>38</sup> Following

11. William Henry Osborn,  
ca. 1853–54. Osborn Family  
Archives



12. Virginia Reed Sturges  
Osborn, ca. 1853–54. Osborn  
Family Archives



Sturges's death in 1874, his sterling character and his support of the arts and an array of charitable causes were eulogized by the Union League Club:

His wisdom was proverbial among his fellow-citizens, but his modesty and gentleness were as conspicuous as his wisdom. . . . His advocacy of human freedom, his devotion to the cause of education, his many acts of charity, his earnest promotion of art, and his zeal in everything that went to the improvement and adornment of the City as a home for its citizens, will long be remembered by a grateful community.<sup>39</sup>

The collection Sturges assembled with such pleasure and passion over four decades was left to his family, and after the death of his wife, his four children donated three important paintings and two sculptures to the Metropolitan Museum in their father's memory.<sup>40</sup> Today, other works from the Sturges collection are found in the Addison Gallery of American Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Chrysler Museum of Art, the Newark Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Morgan Library and Museum, the National Gallery of Art, and the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, among others.<sup>41</sup>

Sturges's profound devotion to the fine arts would be equaled by that of his daughter and son-in-law. In 1853 his eldest child, Virginia Reed Sturges (1830–1902), married W. H. Osborn (1820–1894), a successful businessman

(Figures 11 and 12). Born into a hardworking farming family near Salem, Massachusetts, Osborn left school for Boston at thirteen and joined the merchants Peele, Hubbell, & Co. When he was nineteen, the company sent the precocious Osborn to Manila, in the Philippines, to direct its business in that part of the world, and when he was twenty-one he was offered a partnership. In 1850 Osborn returned to the United States a wealthy man and settled in New York City, where, he said, "more happens . . . in a single day than happens anywhere else in a month."<sup>42</sup> A nonconformist, he usually wore a white duck suit and straw Panama hat, a costume to which he had grown accustomed in the tropics. He was described as an accomplished man who was plainspoken and unpretentious with flashes of fiery temper:

The traits that gave him so remarkable an individuality were . . . his power of will, his enthusiasm in effort, and complete self-reliance. . . . Through his indomitable perseverance he soon acquired a good commercial education, which, as time passed, was broadened in all directions. . . . Few men have had a deeper sense of stewardship, and fewer still have been as unostentatious. . . . The hatred Mr. Osborn had for shams of all sorts he did not hide. Indeed he deemed it his duty to expose such whether they were men or measures. . . . From childhood Mr. Osborn loved books, and had read extensively and with rare discrimination. His fine library was especially rich in French and Spanish literature; in both of which



languages he was fluent. . . . His love of the beautiful in nature and art was innate. Artists were among his cherished friends.<sup>43</sup>

In New York, Osborn met the merchants whom he had come to know in the East Indies trade, and through them he became acquainted with Jonathan Sturges and Virginia, whom he married in 1853. It proved a happy relationship, marked by extensive travel abroad and a replication of the Sturges family's philanthropic and richly cultured home environment. Although not much of a joiner, Osborn was affiliated with a group of like-minded friends called the Travellers, convened by Frederic E. Church, whose members included Gottschalk, the explorer Isaac Hayes, the writer Bayard Taylor, and the collectors William T. Blodgett and Cyrus Field.<sup>44</sup> In 1854 Osborn took over the presidency of the new Illinois Central Railroad from Sturges, saving Sturges and the railroad from bankruptcy and scandal, and spending his entire fortune in the process.<sup>45</sup> A biographical sketch found in the Osborn family papers notes that "until 1882 . . . —great years in the history of the Company—William H Osborn . . . was the dominant, controlling personality on the Illinois Central."<sup>46</sup> In the 1850s he worked with Abraham Lincoln, outside counsel for the railroad; Ambrose Burnside, treasurer; and George McClellan, chief engineer and vice-president. During the Civil War he continued his relationship with Burnside and McClellan, who served as generals while Osborn directed the movement of Union troops and supplies on the Illinois Central (Figure 13).

The Sturges and Osborn families also developed a close friendship with J. Pierpont Morgan, and in 1861 Morgan married Jonathan Sturges's second daughter, Amelia, a sprightly young woman called "Memie." The match ended tragically in 1862, when she died in France of "galloping consumption,"<sup>47</sup> but the family ties endured through three generations—the Osborn boys addressed Morgan as "Uncle Pierpont," and Morgan would become influential in William Church Osborn's later involvement with the Metropolitan.<sup>48</sup> Soon after meeting Sturges, Osborn had begun to assemble a distinguished collection of American art comprising purchases and commissions, supplemented by gifts from artists and from his father-in-law. In 1857 Virginia wrote Amelia, "You must tell father, it would do his heart good to see Mr. Osborn's enjoyment of Mr. Durand's sketch. Every morning when I come down I find the curtain drawn back, and my husband drinking in large draughts of forest coolness. . . . I suppose he exclaims a dozen times 'how beautiful, how perfect it is.'"<sup>49</sup>

Many of the Osborns' activities are recorded in letters from Virginia to friends and family.<sup>50</sup> In March 1855 she mentions that Frederic Church had spent the evening with them.<sup>51</sup> If Jonathan Sturges had been a close friend of Durand, W. H. Osborn was even closer to Frederic Church.



We do not know how they met, but it may have been through Sturges. Osborn and Church were contemporaries, as were their wives, who were both deeply religious, and each couple had endured the tragedy of losing two children in the same year.<sup>52</sup> Isabel and Frederic Church made the Osborns' New York town house their winter home when they were not traveling to warmer climates.<sup>53</sup> The Osborn boys became lifelong friends of the Church children, addressing one another as "cousin," and throughout his life, William Osborn used his middle name, Church, for all official purposes.

By 1856 W. H. Osborn had purchased Church's majestic *Andes of Ecuador* (1855, Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina), and he subsequently acquired some two dozen paintings by the artist (an estimate, since no comprehensive inventory of the collection is known).<sup>54</sup> Among the most noteworthy were *Chimborazo* (1864, Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California); *Pichincha* (1867, Philadelphia Museum of Art); and the impressive *Aegean Sea* (Figure 14). *The Andes of Ecuador* was featured in the art exhibition at the 1864 Metropolitan Fair, and *Chimborazo* traveled to the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia.<sup>55</sup> In a photograph of the Osborns' town-house interior (Figure 15), *The Aegean Sea*, in a massive Aesthetic Movement frame designed by Church, is flanked on the left by his Arctic study *The Iceberg* (ca. 1874, Terra Museum of American Art, Chicago). *The Aegean Sea* is a glorious jumble of architectural monuments and ruins from the ancient cities of Petra, Baalbek, Constantinople, and Athens.<sup>56</sup> We know that Church relied on photographs taken

13. W. H. Osborn with Ambrose Burnside (center) and two other unidentified men, 1860s. Osborn Family Archives



14. Frederic Edwin Church (American, 1826–1900). *The Aegean Sea*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 54 x 63 1/4 in. (137.2 x 160.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Mrs. William H. Osborn, 1902 (02.23)

during his 1867–68 trip to the Middle East, as well as his extensive library, for motifs in his Orientalist paintings and for the design of Olana, his Moorish villa retreat overlooking the Hudson River. In 1887 Virginia wrote to her daughter-in-law Lucretia about the painting: “[L]ast week Mr. Church asked us to send the ‘Aegean Sea’ to his studio. He has painted on it, and improved it wonderfully. At Mr. Church’s

request we have put the ‘Aegean Sea’ in the front parlor and the Andes of Ecuador in the dining room.”<sup>57</sup> In 1893 Church again borrowed back *The Aegean Sea*, for exhibition at London’s Fine Arts Society. The painting came to the Metropolitan in 1902, following Virginia Osborn’s death, and remains on view to this day in the American galleries.<sup>58</sup> Surprisingly, given Church’s importance as a painter and his role as a founder of the Museum, it was his first painting to enter the collection.

Church and Osborn were also bound by their love for land and home—or rather, castle. An extensive correspondence documents their selections of land and vista, architect and designer, as well as crops, flowers, trees, and animals for their country estates—Church at Olana (begun 1870), and Osborn in a succession of properties in Garrison.<sup>59</sup> It is clear from their letters that Osborn’s choice of a manorial home overlooking the Hudson River—the Rhenish-style Castle Rock (1881)—was influenced by Olana, with its sweeping river views. It may not be coincidental that Church’s first architect for Olana was Richard Morris Hunt, who designed twin houses for W. H. Osborn at 32 and 34 Park Avenue, completed in 1870 (Figure 16).<sup>60</sup>

Among the many gifts that changed hands between patron and painter was a canvas by the Boston landscapist George Loring Brown (1814–1889) entitled *View at Amalfi, Bay of Salerno* (Figure 17). Brown’s tranquil, static composition was one among many that he painted for the tourist trade while he was living in Rome. The circumstances surrounding this gift are revealed in a letter from Church to Osborn:

I found at an auction a fine example by Geo. L. Brown the Landscape Painter—As he resided most of his life in Boston, he is not so well known in New York, excepting among artists, as he ought to be—I always admired his best works and was glad to have the opportunity to secure the one referred to—A view at Amalfi. . . . I bought the picture for you hoping you would like it and think it a desirable addition to your collection of American Painters. You can hardly help liking the charming Claude like tone it possesses.<sup>61</sup>

Church also introduced the Osborns to the eccentric painter Samuel Worcester Rowse (1822–1901), a neighbor in the Tenth Street Studio Building. Rowse, a Bostonian, was known for his exquisitely rendered crayon portraits. W. H. Osborn purchased at least two works by Rowse.<sup>62</sup> He may also have owned a *Sleeping Peri* marble by the Albany sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer, one of Church’s close friends.<sup>63</sup>

If Church advised Osborn on art collecting, Osborn advised Church on financial matters, going so far as to reconcile the latter’s bankbook on more than one occasion. He helped Church secure sales, commissions, and exhibitions



15. Interior of the Osborn town house, 32 Park Avenue, New York, with Figure 14 on view, undated. Osborn Family Archives





16. Richard Morris Hunt (American, 1827–1895). Osborn and Sturges twin town houses, 32 and 34 Park Avenue, New York, completed 1870. Osborn Family Archives

through his extensive business contacts at home and in Great Britain. In 1867 Osborn financed a two-year trip for Church and his family to Europe and the Holy Land. Church paid him back gradually, at least partly with paintings. In September 1868 he wrote Osborn from Perugia:

When I get home I shall want to take a good look at the picture you have received. I hope you will not keep it unless you prefer to do so. You have been so good a friend of ours that I am particularly anxious that you should possess such of my works as you consider my best—I will gladly paint another in the place of it when I return. I can tell at a glance when I see it whether I was mistaken in my opinion or not.<sup>64</sup>

Osborn also acquired a handful of pieces by contemporary European artists, academically trained figure painters favored by Americans: Florent Willems (1823–1905), Franz von DeFregger (1835–1921), Benjamin Vautier (1829–1898), George Jacobides (1853–1932), and Charles Landelle (1821–1908). Landelle, an Orientalist, was apparently recommended by Church. With the \$20,000 given to him by the Illinois Central upon retirement, Osborn purchased a painting by Frederic, Lord Leighton (1830–1896), *Serenely*

*Wandering in a Trance of Somber Thought* (1885, private collection), a portrait of the artist's favorite model, Dorothy Dene. The proportion of American to European works in the Osborn collection, perhaps nine to one, was unusual. In the 1870s and 1880s, Americans were focusing on French landscapes of the Barbizon school, paintings by the Spanish-influenced Munich school, and academic figural compositions by such artists as Adolphe-William Bouguereau (1825–1905), Alexandre Cabanel (1823–1889), and Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904). Osborn did not own any Barbizon paintings, but he evidently admired the Munich school.

A few of Osborn's acquisitions were made at auction or from dealers, but most of his American pictures were purchased from the artists. In 1868 both Osborn and Sturges bought works at the Abraham M. Cozzens sale, and Osborn also bought two paintings by J. F. Kensett at the 1877 estate sale of the artist's sister.<sup>65</sup> In 1888 he bought Church's *Pichincha* from the prominent New York dealer Samuel P. Avery Jr.<sup>66</sup> These purchases were complemented by works given to Virginia by her father or inherited later from her parents. Among the American artists represented in the collection were Church, Cole, Durand, Kensett, Gray, Rowse, Leutze, Daniel Huntington, Sanford Gifford (1823–1880), F. O. C. Darley (1821–1888), John Casilear (1811–1893), William Holbrook Beard (1824–1900), Louis Remy Mignot (1831–1870), W. W. Wotherspoon (1821–1888), Richard M. Staigg (1817–1881), and Thomas Crawford (1813/14–1857).<sup>67</sup>

Probably owing to his father-in-law's close relationship with the artist, W. H. Osborn acquired two paintings by Henry Peters Gray. *The Pride of the Village* (Figure 18) is a scene from Washington Irving's short story about a doomed love affair between a wholesome country girl and a devil-may-care soldier.<sup>68</sup> *The Pride of the Village* appears in a

17. George Loring Brown (American, 1814–1889). *View at Amalfi, Bay of Salerno*, 1857. Oil on canvas, 33 1/4 x 53 3/4 in. (84.5 x 136.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of William Church Osborn, 1903 (03.34)





18. Henry Peters Gray (American, 1819–1877). *The Pride of the Village*, 1858–59. Oil on canvas, 30¼ x 25¼ in. (76.8 x 64.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of William Church Osborn, 1949 (49.166)



photograph of the interior of the Osborns' New York town house (Figure 19) hanging beside paintings by Church, Cole, and Huntington, whose *Ichabod Crane and Katrina Van Tassel* (1855, Historic Hudson Valley, Tarrytown, New York) was also inspired by Irving. Despite its sentimentality, or perhaps because of it, *The Pride of the Village* was a popular favorite, lent by W. H. Osborn to both the Metropolitan Fair and the 1867 Exposition Universelle. Osborn purchased a second painting by Gray at the Cozzens estate sale.<sup>69</sup> The other work by Gray, *The Greek Lovers* (Figure 20), is an allegory depicting a youth and a maiden, the former wearing the Phrygian cap that traditionally symbolizes liberty. This may be a reference to the 1821–29 Greek war of independence against Ottoman Empire rule. *The Greek Lovers* appears in the series of Osborn interior photographs, flanked by works ascribed to Durand, Crawford, Huntington, Gilbert Stuart, and William Holbrook Beard (Figure 21).<sup>70</sup>

Today paintings and sculpture from the W. H. Osborn collection are in the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, the Museum of the City of New York, the National Portrait Gallery, the Terra Museum of

19. Interior of the Osborn town house, with Figure 18 on view, undated. Osborn Family Archives





American Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.<sup>71</sup> Although we can identify only a modest portion of Osborn's collection—perhaps one-third of the total—the available evidence suggests that he was not a particularly avant-garde collector. Rather, he bought what he liked, deriving pleasure from his personal contact with many artists and his ability to support their careers.

Like the Sturges family, the Osborns enjoyed an active social and cultural life. Virginia Osborn's letters chronicle social gatherings with such distinguished participants as Candace and Dora Wheeler; Worthington Whittredge; Sanford Gifford; Junius, Pierpont, and Fanny Morgan; Mayor Abram S. Hewitt; Generals Burnside and McClellan; and the British statesmen Richard Cobden, James Caird, and Henry Palmerston. In 1864 Virginia described for one of her aunts a festive holiday party:

On Wednesday evening Mr. Cozzens gave a very pleasant Twelfth Night party, which we all attended. Miss Leutze daughter of the artist was Queen and Mr. Kensett king. The ceremony was very pretty and some



20. Henry Peters Gray. *The Greek Lovers*, 1846. Oil on canvas, 40¼ x 51½ in. (102.2 x 130.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of William Church Osborn, 1902 (02.7.2)

of the figures quaint and striking. Mr. Bierstadt carried the boar's head, and Mr. Whittredge was an ancient harper. Several of the Trinity church boys sang beautifully, and the whole passed off pleasantly.<sup>72</sup>



21. Interior of the Osborn town house, with Figure 20 on view, undated. Osborn Family Archives



22. Alice and William Church Osborn, fiftieth wedding anniversary, 1936. Osborn Family Archives

Osborn supported numerous artists, arts organizations, and causes. Although not a founder of the Metropolitan Museum, he contributed \$500, one of the most generous donations, to the first capital campaign.<sup>73</sup> Several fine paintings from his collection were given or bequeathed to the Metropolitan and continue to be on permanent display. With Sturges, Osborn donated to a fund to keep Dr. Henry Abbott's collection of Egyptian antiquities in New York City and open to the public as a museum.<sup>74</sup> Osborn also subscribed to the publication of engravings after several of Church's paintings and after Durand's portrait of William Cullen Bryant. In 1886 the Osborns took the English portrait painter John Hanson Walker (1843–1933) under their wing, commissioning several family portraits and arranging for other orders from friends and family.<sup>75</sup> Walker had come to New York in 1886 to revive a lagging career and may have been introduced to the Osborns by Lord Leighton.<sup>76</sup>

Virginia and William Osborn had two children who survived infancy: Henry Fairfield (1857–1935) and William Church (1862–1951). Each attended Princeton University and went on to pursue graduate study.<sup>77</sup> Fairfield, a preeminent paleontologist, geologist, and eugenicist, taught at both Princeton and Columbia,<sup>78</sup> and was a founder and president of the New York Zoological Society and a president of the American Museum of Natural History. William, our focus here, made his mark as a lawyer, philanthropist, environmentalist, art patron, and longtime trustee and president of the Metropolitan Museum. After attending Harvard Law School, he became counsel principally to corporations and railroads.<sup>79</sup> In 1886 he married Alice Dodge, whose father was heir to a mining fortune as part-owner of the Phelps-Dodge Corporation. Both the Osborns and the

Dodges were liberal, unostentatious, deeply religious, philanthropic, and pro-Union. Apart from Alice and William's shared wealth and social status, their marriage was a love match (Figure 22).

The painter Michael Werboff (1896–1996), who painted William Church Osborn's portrait for the Metropolitan Museum in the 1940s, provided a character sketch of his patron:

[William Church Osborn] was one of the most interesting personalities that it was my privilege to know and to paint. . . . In spite of the prominent positions that [he] occupied in New York, he was [a] most unassuming person. . . . He had a profound mind and a "dry" sence [*sic*] of humor—sometimes even making fun about himself. . . . He took a liking to me and I was often invited for lunch or dinner to his home . . . filled with works of art . . . presided over by the "omioadored Aunt Alice," as Mrs. Osborn was affectionately called. . . . He was a true example of what could be called "a perfect—purely American—gentleman of the highest cultural and moral standards. . . . Through his life [he] tried to never live a day without doing something for the benefit of his fellow men."<sup>80</sup>

In 1902 William Church Osborn and his brother each inherited half of the family collection, comprising nineteenth-century American paintings, sculpture, and prints, and several European paintings or copies thereof by American artists. Although the native landscape school had fallen out of fashion, William kept most of the Hudson River School works that he had inherited, apart from a handful of key paintings that he and Fairfield donated to the Metropolitan Museum, as they felt their parents would have wanted.

The year of his inheritance, William began to assemble a rather small but distinguished collection of French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings, with the initial purchase of Claude Monet's *Cliff Walk at Pourville* (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm) from Durand-Ruel Gallery in New York. It is unclear why he chose to depart from family tradition to focus his attention and money on Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Although this was about a decade after Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, Mrs. Potter Palmer, and P. A. B. Widener had begun to collect Impressionist art,<sup>81</sup> the style was still a novelty in the United States. Osborn's son Frederick described this first Impressionist acquisition:

He used to walk from his house at 36th Street to the subway at 14th Street. . . . About 1904 or 1905 his walk took him by . . . Durand-Rouel [*sic*] . . . and he saw in the window a painting of scenery which stirred his imagination. When he . . . asked to see the painting, he was told it was by Claude Monet who was the rage in Paris, and that Durand was introducing





23. Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883). *The Spanish Singer*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 58 x 45 in. (147.3 x 114.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of William Church Osborn, 1949 (49.58.2)



24. Library, William Church Osborn home, 40 East Thirty-sixth Street, New York, with Figure 23 and a Gilbert Stuart portrait on view, undated. Osborn Family Archives

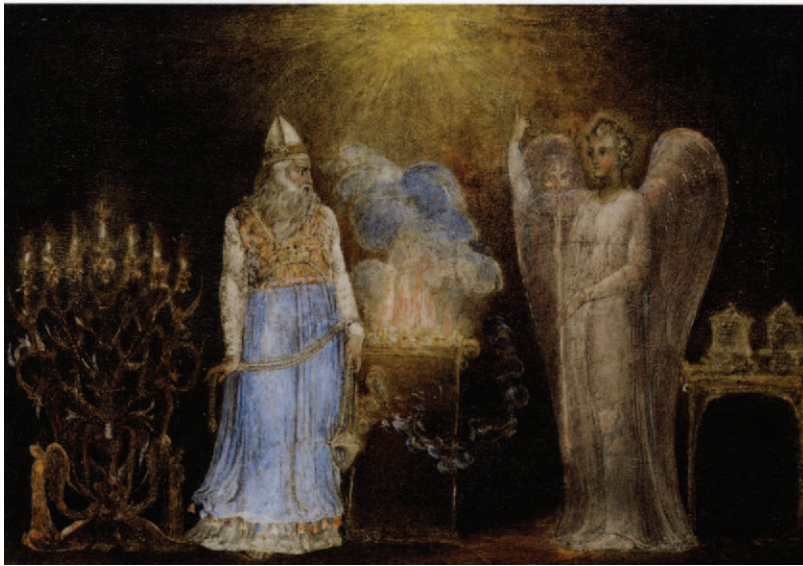
Monet in New York. My father had the picture hung in the house for a week and then bought it, I think for four or five thousand dollars, which seemed a... big price for a picture by an artist who was then not much known in this country.... [He] bought all of [his French paintings] through New York dealers. He was very choosy about what he bought and he usually had a picture hung in his house for two or three weeks before he decided whether he was going to buy it or not.... By the time I went to college the main living room... was a gallery displaying eight magnificent Impressionists by Monet and Pissarro.<sup>82</sup>

William Church Osborn also had the interiors of his New York house photographed, providing a partial record of his collection, and inventories were drawn up in 1927 and about 1951. The 1927 appraisal of the art at 40 East Thirty-sixth Street includes two Gilbert Stuarts, and paintings by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), Georges Michel (1763–1843), Jean Cazin (1841–1901), Jules Dupré (1811–1889), Robert C. Minor (1839–1904), Ralph Blakelock (1847–1919), Ernest Lawson (1873–1939), and J. A. M. Whistler (1834–1903)—most of them pictures he had purchased.<sup>83</sup> These



25. Paul Gauguin (French, 1848–1903). *Two Tahitian Women*, 1899. Oil on canvas, 37 x 28½ in. (94 x 72.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of William Church Osborn, 1949 (49.58.1)





26. William Blake (English, 1757–1827). *Zacharias and the Angel*. Tempera and glue size on canvas, 10½ x 15 in. (26.7 x 38.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of William Church Osborn, 1951 (51.30.1)

purchases were supplemented by the works he had inherited by Church, Durand, Kensett, Huntington, Beard, Vautier, and Rowse. The earlier inventory lists the contents of the house room by room: in his bedroom Osborn had three American landscapes, including a Durand and a Church. The Impressionist canvases—six by Monet, one by Édouard Manet, and one by Camille Pissarro—he installed in the living room, while the library featured Manet's *Spanish Singer* (Figures 23 and 24). By the time of the 1951 estate appraisal, Osborn's collection had expanded to include two pictures by Paul Gauguin (Figure 25), a second Pissarro, a John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) oil study, a Homer Dodge Martin (1836–1897), a number of oils and watercolors by George Pearce Ennis (1884–1936), a landscape by Richard Wilson (1714–1782), and a painting attributed to John Crome (1768–1821). In total, Osborn purchased two Pissarros, two Gauguins, one Manet, and seven Monets—oil paintings of substantial importance.<sup>84</sup>

His collection, including prints, numbered just under one hundred works. Alice Osborn had purchased William Blake's *Zacharias and the Angel* (Figure 26) from London's



27. Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926). *Regatta at Sainte-Adresse*, 1867. Oil on canvas, 29½ x 40 in. (75.2 x 101.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of William Church Osborn, 1951 (51.30.4)





28. Claude Monet. *Vétheuil in Summer*, 1880. Oil on canvas, 23 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 39 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (60 x 99.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of William Church Osborn, 1951 (51.30.3)

Carfax Gallery before their marriage. The Michel came from S. P. Avery Jr., with whom Osborn's father and grandfather had done business. From Knoedler's he acquired Cazin's *Twilight* and the portrait of a lady by Reynolds.<sup>85</sup> A 1932 document from Durand-Ruel lists the nine works he purchased from them. By far the highest sum he paid was in 1906, when he bought Manet's early masterpiece *The Spanish Singer* for \$33,000. In 1902 he spent \$4,000 for Monet's *Cliff Walk at Pourville*, and in 1907 he acquired Monet's *Regatta at Sainte-Adresse* (Figure 27), which Durand-Ruel had bought one month earlier at P. A. B. Widener's Philadelphia sale. In 1912 he was obliged to pay \$12,000 to secure Monet's *Vétheuil in Summer* (Figure 28).<sup>86</sup> We do not know if William Church Osborn, like his father and grandfather, bought art at auction.

While Osborn's interest in French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painting was apparently a major divergence from his father and grandfather's focus on American landscape and genre scenes, I would argue that in proto-Impressionist paintings such as Pissarro's early masterpiece *Jalais Hill, Pontoise* (Figures 29 and 30), with its dark green tonality, and Monet's *Regatta at Sainte-Adresse*, with its flat, curving shoreline, wide expanse of water, and horizontal composition, there is an aesthetic kinship to landscapes and beach scenes in the Osborn and Sturges collections by Kensett, Gifford, Cole, and Durand.

Like his father and grandfather, William Church Osborn was a friend and patron of several artists. In 1951 sculptor Malvina Hoffman (1885–1966) wrote with feeling to his son Frederick, whom she was helping with the arrangements

for adding William's name to Alice's tombstone: "I felt a deep sense of personal loss when I read of the death of your father. Knowing him as a friend had been a privilege."<sup>87</sup> A more formal sign of Osborn's philanthropic interests was the purchase prize he established in 1929 at the annual exhibition of the American Watercolor Society. In 1948 he invited friends and family to view a display of twenty watercolors he had acquired in this manner. The artists included George Elmer Browne (1871–1946), Bertram Hartman (1882–1960), Chauncey F. Ryder (1868–1949), Henry Gasser (1909–1981), and Wayman Adams (1883–1959).<sup>88</sup> Osborn must have known the society's president George Pearse Ennis fairly well because he owned a half dozen of his watercolors and oils. His daughter Aileen took a few informal lessons from Ennis, who taught at the Grand Central School of Art.<sup>89</sup> The American Watercolor Society elected Osborn one of its first honorary nonartist members in 1944.

William Church Osborn loaned his art to a number of important exhibitions, notably to *Masterpieces of Art*, presented at the 1939–40 New York World's Fair (Gauguin, *Two Tahitian Women*, and Manet, *The Spanish Singer*), and to the 1940 Golden Gate International Exposition at the Palace of Fine Arts (Monet, *Regatta at Sainte-Adresse*, and Gauguin, *Brittany Landscape*). He also loaned Church's *Chimborazo*, *Sunrise in Syria*, and *Tropical Moonlight* to the pivotal 1945 exhibition *The Hudson River School and the Early American Landscape Tradition*, presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Art Institute of Chicago.

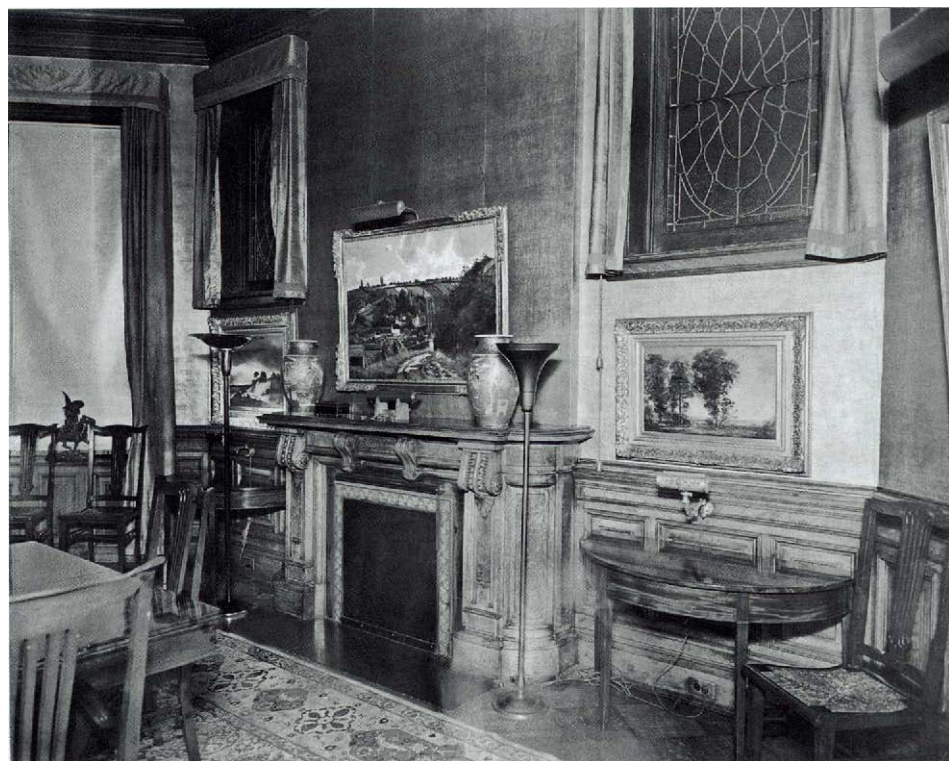
In 1904 Osborn was elected a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum. Many of his friends and family members had been



29. Camille Pissarro (French, 1830–1903). *Jalais Hill, Pontoise*, 1867. Oil on canvas, 34 1/4 x 45 1/4 in. (87 x 114.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of William Church Osborn, 1951 (51.30.2)



30. Dining room, William Church Osborn residence, with Figure 29 on display, undated. Osborn Family Archives



closely involved with the Museum, among them his father-in-law, William E. Dodge Jr., and his uncle Pierpont Morgan. His years in office coincided with a pivotal period in the Metropolitan's history, spanning two world wars, several building projects, a burgeoning in the collections and staff, and a formalization of the practices of museum management. Osborn served on the library, audit, and sculpture committees and later on the executive, finance, and building committees. In 1925 he and Alice inspected the Egyptian excavations directed by Albert Lythgoe and Herbert Winlock at Thebes and Lisht.<sup>90</sup> Osborn was appointed a vice-president in 1932, and in 1933, when the incumbent president, William Sloane Coffin, died suddenly, the board proposed Osborn as his successor. He declined, citing pressing civic and political obligations, instead recommending George Blumenthal, a major collector and the first Jewish trustee.<sup>91</sup> Osborn succeeded Blumenthal in 1941, with the understanding that it would be a short-term appointment. Alice Osborn described what seems to have been his first official appearance:

Last week . . . I was in town for a reception to open the Verplank [sic] Room, which is a real acquisition to the American Wing. . . . I never knew anyone could

have as many descendants as the original Verplank had! Wednesday, the first big reception given under the new regime attracted over 3,500. Seventy-five of the Trustees, Curators, etc. dined in the really lovely new staff dining room, with cocktails before in the Armor Hall, with the knights of old surveying us. It was really like a big family party, with many amusing things said and unsaid.<sup>92</sup>

Osborn played an active role in several building campaigns as well as in expanding the size and scope of the collections.<sup>93</sup> In 1907 he spearheaded the Museum's first purchase of an Impressionist painting, Auguste Renoir's *Madame Charpentier and Her Children*, a controversial acquisition because of its perceived modernity.<sup>94</sup> He also oversaw the removal of the most fragile and rare masterpieces from the Museum to remote storage during World War II.<sup>95</sup> During his presidency, the Junior Museum was established as an interactive educational resource for schoolchildren, a popular innovation that set a precedent for museums across the country.<sup>96</sup> In 1949 Osborn donated to the Museum Gauguin's *Two Tahitian Women*, Manet's *Spanish Singer*, and Gray's *Pride of the Village*. By the terms of his will, at his death in 1951 Monet's *Vétheuil in Summer*, *Manneporte (Étretat)*, and *Regatta at Sainte-Adresse*, Pissarro's *Jalais Hill*, *Pontoise*, and Blake's *Zacharias and the Angel* entered the Museum's permanent collection.<sup>97</sup> Each July Osborn gave \$1,000 toward the Museum's operating expenses, and he provided other significant financial support over the years.<sup>98</sup> In 1949, upon his retirement from the board, the trustees expressed their appreciation in a commemorative engraved testimonial:

During the period of your distinguished work for its benefit, the Museum has grown enormously in the strength of its collections and in its usefulness to the nation. Constant in your thought for it, wise in your counsel, and quick in your action for its advantage; alive to a sense of its obligations and opportunities, keenly interested in the arts it collects, sympathetic with the people it serves, and mindful of the welfare of those who serve it—you have brought to the Museum talents through which have come, in large degree, its rise to the position of eminence it now enjoys.<sup>99</sup>

After Osborn's death, friends and colleagues organized a memorial committee and on June 15, 1953, unveiled the William Church Osborn Memorial Gates, guarding a new playground at Fifth Avenue and Eighty-fourth Street.<sup>100</sup> Designed by the prominent American sculptor Paul Manship (1886–1966) and in part inspired by scenes from *Aesop's Fables*, the gates paid tribute to Osborn's passions for art and the well-being of children. The gates were removed for restoration in 1993 and plans are under way to finish the

ambitious and costly project, with a reinstallation planned by the end of 2008.<sup>101</sup> Meanwhile, the artistic and philanthropic legacy left by three generations of Sturges and Osborn family members endures.<sup>102</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the following individuals: family descendants Frederick H. Osborn III and Anne Todd Osborn; Mary Rousseau, Alexandra Frost, and Fargo Rousseau; scholars Wayne Craven, Linda Ferber, and Ella M. Foshay, and dealer Ira Spanierman, who set me on the Osborn path long ago. At the Metropolitan Museum, Kevin Avery, James Draper, Katharine Baetjer, and Barbara File have been gracious and helpful. Joanna Ekman was a skilled and diplomatic editor.

## NOTES

1. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art were incorporated in 1870. The first public art museum in the country was the Wadsworth Atheneum, established by the patron Daniel Wadsworth and opened in 1842.
2. The city's first public art museum was the New-York Gallery of the Fine Arts, founded in 1844. By 1858 lack of funding led to the gallery's assimilation into the New-York Historical Society. See Maybelle Mann, "The New-York Gallery of Fine Arts: A Source of Refinement," *American Art Journal* 11 (January 1979), pp. 76–86.
3. For some reason, Tuckerman's inventory is incomplete. The primary sources on Sturges are Mrs. Jonathan Sturges, *Reminiscences of a Long Life* (New York, 1894); JoAnne Dickson, "Patronage of Nineteenth Century American Painters: Jonathan Sturges and His Associates" (master's thesis, San Francisco State University, 1973); Alfred Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount* (New York, 1975), pp. 95–100; and "Our Private Collections: No. II," *The Crayon* 3, no. 2 (February 1856), pp. 57–58.
4. The primary source on Reed is Ella M. Foshay, *Mr. Luman Reed's Picture Gallery: A Pioneer Collection of American Art* (New York, 1990). The Reed and Sturges families intermarried twice: Sturges's eldest son Frederick (1833–1917) married Reed's granddaughter Mary Fuller (1834–1886), and Sturges's granddaughter Sarah (1901–1988) married Reed's great-great-grandson Dudley Parker (1897–1984).
5. In fact, Sturges was so hardworking that he scheduled his wedding for Christmas Day, the only holiday he allowed himself.
6. Sturges also served as a founding director and acting president of the Illinois Central Railroad as well as a director of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad.
7. Arthur Sturges diary, March 24, 1863, private collection. Gottschalk, a renowned concert pianist, is considered the first American composer. The Titian copy was painted by Durand during his European travels of 1840–41.
8. "The Obituary Record: Mrs. Mary Pemberton Sturges," *New York Times*, July 31, 1894, p. 5.
9. Sturges notes this in a manuscript he wrote in the 1850s for the art periodical *The Crayon* but never published. See Sturges Family Papers, part 3, folder 8, Pierpont Morgan Library Archives.

10. Reed to Sturges, June 4, 1835, Sturges Family Papers, pt. 3, folder 2.
11. That year Sturges also purchased William Sidney Mount's *Farmers Noonning*, and he later helped to arrange for the painting to be engraved and distributed under the auspices of the American Art-Union, the popular annual lottery that promoted American art. Although he owned the painting, he made sure that Mount was fairly paid.
12. The exception was Benjamin Vautier's *Children and Dog*. Since W. H. Osborn owned two Vautiers, it is possible that his choice influenced his father-in-law to buy one.
13. The American Art-Union held an annual lottery with original works of art as prizes, distributed prints to members, and presented changing exhibitions in its gallery. For the pre-Civil War art market in New York City, see Carrie Reborra Barratt, "Mapping the Venues, New York City Art Exhibitions," in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825–1861*, ed. Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat, exh. cat., MMA (New York, 2000), pp. 47–81.
14. Cole to Sturges, February 24, 1837, private collection.
15. Earlier, moreover, when Cole's dear friend the painter Cornelius Ver Bryck (1813–1844) was terminally ill with consumption, Sturges had offered support in the form of a commission that he knew might never be completed. Ver Bryck was at first loath to accept, but Cole offered to finish the painting once he was gone. *View on the Thames*, the result of this gentlemen's agreement, was donated to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston by Sturges descendants.
16. Sturges to Durand, May 30, 1840, Asher Brown Durand Papers, New York Public Library; microfilm copy, reel N19, frame 1229, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Sturges offered to sponsor European travel for Mount as well, but he declined. In the ensuing years, Sturges made several European trips, visiting public and private galleries and artists' studios in London, Paris, and Rome.
17. Letters in the Asher Brown Durand Papers addressed to John, care of 125–127 Front Street, and correspondence referring to his employment with Sturges suggest that John worked for the business from 1836 to 1852. Reed had offered John a job in 1836, just before he died, and Sturges honored that commitment.
18. The second Durand is *God's Judgment Upon Gog*, now in the Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia. This painting, unique in the artist's body of work, was deaccessioned by the Metropolitan many years ago.
19. Sturges to Durand, May 23, 1857, Durand Papers, reel N20, frame 985.
20. Sturges also loaned Durand's *Forest Scene* to the 1864 Metropolitan Fair. It is not clear if this title refers to *In the Woods* or to another Durand.
21. Sturges account book, April 4 and June 4, 1845, Jonathan Sturges Papers, reel 2672, no frame, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
22. Sturges twice helped fund Academy buildings; the first building opened in 1850, and the second in 1865.
23. John Durand diary, October 31, [1846], Durand Papers, reel N21, frame 1030.
24. The payments to Ingham were on December 1, for \$200; December 19, for \$150; and December 31, for \$150. Sturges Papers, reel 2672, no frame.
25. See Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (New York, 1867); Joshua C. Taylor, *William Page: The American Titian* (Chicago, 1957); John K. Howat et al., *19th-Century America: Paintings and Sculpture*, exh. cat., MMA (New York, 1970); William H. Gerds and Russell Burke, *American Still-Life Painting* (New York, 1971); and Voorsanger and Howat, *Art and the Empire City*.
26. Sturges, W. H. Osborn, and William Church Osborn each had photographs taken of the interiors of their New York City homes but not, as far as we know, of the interiors of their country homes.
27. Sturges account book, entries for May 24 and November 27, 1848, Sturges Papers, reel 2672, no frame.
28. In 1845 Sturges published a thinly disguised letter to the editor of the *Broadway Journal* refusing credit for his role as organizer and financial supporter of the gallery, suggesting to readers that rather than criticizing the modest size and uneven quality of the Reed collection, they commission paintings to help amplify it. S. J., "New York Gallery of the Fine Arts," *Broadway Journal*, March 22, 1845, p. 187.
29. Apparently the portrait either was never painted or has been lost, since the Academy has no record of it.
30. National Academy of Design Council Meeting Minutes, March 30, 1863, p. 67, transcript, reel 798, no frame, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
31. [Thomas Seir Cummings?], Council Meeting Minutes, November 30, 1874, Archives of the National Academy of Design, New York City. I am grateful to Mark Mitchell, former associate curator, for his assistance in locating this source.
32. John Durand diary, February 19, [ca. 1841–42], Durand Papers, reel N21, frames 1040–41. It is likely that the discussion was prompted by the brouhaha surrounding Horatio Greenough's marble sculpture of George Washington wearing a toga, with a partially bared torso, which was installed in the Capitol Rotunda in 1841.
33. Sturges was the club's second president. He played an important role in helping to alleviate the ravages of the 1863 draft riots.
34. According to Tuckerman, "the surprise and delight exhibited by the thousands of all degrees, who visited the Picture Gallery of the Metropolitan Fair, has suggested to many, for the first time, and renewed in other minds more emphatically, the need, desireableness, and practicality of a permanent and free Gallery of Art in our Cities." Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, p. 11.
35. Mary was the head of the women's committee that was largely responsible for organizing the exhibition, and Virginia was a member. Jonathan loaned Inman's *Newsboy* and Durand's *Forest Scene*, a modest contribution compared to that of Marshall O. Roberts, the leading American art collector of the day.
36. "Meeting of the Officers of the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *New York Times*, December 23, 1870, p. 2.
37. Sturges to Durand, March 19, 1870, Durand Papers, reel 21, frames 3–4.
38. In 1873, however, he was one of five principal donors when Henry Peters Gray's *Wages of War* was purchased for the Museum by subscription.
39. "The Late Jonathan Sturges: Action of the Union League Club—Speeches and Resolutions," *New York Times*, December 1, 1874, p. 2.
40. Although there is no complete inventory of the Sturges collection, it may have been twice as large as Tuckerman's list of thirty-eight works.
41. The collection of Sturges's son Frederick included paintings by Durand and academic European artists. Sturges's youngest child, Henry, a major bibliophile, purchased two Hudson River School masterworks, Church's *Rainy Season in the Tropics* and Cole's *View of the Mountain Pass Called the Notch of the White Mountains*, as well as other American paintings.
42. "William Henry Osborn," unpublished biographical sketch, Osborn Family Archives, Garrison, N.Y.
43. J. R. D. [John R. Duryee], "William H. Osborn," *New York Evening Post*, March 5, 1894, p. 8.



44. See John K. Howat, *Frederic Church* (New Haven and London, 2005), pp. 75, 118.
45. Osborn refused Sturges's offer to reimburse the money he had lost. He also served as an informal financial adviser to Jonathan and Frederick Sturges. W. H. Osborn to Frederick Sturges, April 18, 1883, Osborn and Dodge Family Papers, box 1, folder 21, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
46. "Four Presidents in Four Years," unpublished biographical sketch, Osborn Family Archives.
47. See Jean Strouse, *Morgan, American Financier* (New York, 1999). Of the six Sturges children (Virginia, Frederick, Amelia, Edward, Arthur, and Henry), Amelia and Arthur died as young adults.
48. Morgan's relationship with the Sturges family was formative in his early collecting years, when he acquired works by leading American artists, notably Durand's *Landscape—Scene from "Thanatopsis"* (Metropolitan Museum).
49. Virginia Osborn to Amelia Sturges, February 19, 1857, Osborn and Dodge Family Papers, box 5, folder 5.
50. Few letters from Jonathan Sturges and W. H. Osborn survive, and they are a challenge to read. Virginia Osborn was a founder and longtime president of the Bellevue Hospital's Training School for Nurses and was involved in a range of other charities. W. H. Osborn was a leading supporter of the New York Society for the Relief of the Ruptured and Crippled and its hospital, which treated destitute children with hernias and orthopedic problems. He also was an active supporter of the Bellevue Training School for Nurses and the Children's Aid Society.
51. Virginia Osborn to Mrs. Wheeler, March 8, 1855, Henry Fairfield Osborn and Family Papers, box 1, folder 4, courtesy New-York Historical Society. According to National Academy of Design exhibition records, however, by 1852 W. H. Osborn already owned W. W. Wotherspoon's *Torre del Greco, Naples*. He also purchased Samuel F. B. Morse's bust-length portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette at the March 1852 Philip Hone estate auction.
52. In March 1865 Herbert and Emma Church died of diphtheria as babies. In 1875 Virginia Sturges Osborn died of "brain fever" in Italy and Frederick Sturges Osborn drowned while swimming in the Hudson River.
53. In 1899 and 1900, respectively, Isabel and Frederic died at 32 Park Avenue after returning from trips abroad.
54. By then Jonathan Sturges owned Church's *Cordilleras, Sunrise* (1854, private collection), which he lent to the National Academy in 1855. Osborn lent *Andes* to the Academy in 1857.
55. Osborn also loaned Gray's *Pride of the Village* and Huntington's *Antiquarian* to the Metropolitan Fair.
56. See Natalie Spassky et al., *American Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, vol. 2 (New York, 1985), pp. 279–80, for a thorough discussion of *The Aegean Sea*.
57. Virginia Osborn to Lucretia Osborn, March 31, 1887, Osborn Papers, box 4, folder 5.
58. Other significant Church paintings belonging to Osborn were *Tropical Moonlight*, *Sunrise in Syria*, *Beacon off Mount Desert Island*, *Study for Jerusalem*, *The Mountains of Edom*, *The Iceberg*, and *Konigssee*. William Church Osborn donated *The Aegean Sea* to the Metropolitan in accordance with his mother's will (Osborn to Luigi Palma di Cesnola, March 4, 1902, Metropolitan Museum Archives).
59. Osborn bought hundreds of acres of land at Garrison, across from West Point, where members of the family still own property. For Olana, Castle Rock, and another Osborn property, see John Zukowsky, *Hudson River Villas* (New York, 1985).
60. Another pair of town houses, constructed around the same time for the Sturges and Osborn families, was designed by H. H. Richardson, the prominent architect of Boston's Trinity Church. The town houses were in the same block as Hunt's, perhaps even adjacent to it.
61. Church to Osborn, April 15, 1888, Osborn and Dodge Family Papers, box 1, folder 9. Surprisingly, given Church's remarks, *View at Amalfi, Bay of Salerno* is not a small picture (roughly 33 by 54 in.).
62. We do not know who or what was depicted in these works—one may be an oil still owned by the family. Sturges commissioned Rowse to draw his son Edward (private collection). Olana owns a painting and a drawing by Rowse, whose likeness is recorded in Eastman Johnson's *Funding Bill* (1881, Metropolitan Museum).
63. The commission for a *Sleeping Peri* is discussed in the Osborn-Church correspondence, but it is unclear if Palmer ever made the sculpture for Osborn.
64. Church to Osborn, September 29, 1868, courtesy of Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.
65. In 1852 Osborn purchased Morse's *Marquis de Lafayette* at the Hone sale; in 1876 he donated it to the Lenox Library. The New York Public Library sold the painting in 2005 for \$1,360,000.
66. S. P. Avery Jr. to Mr. Wm H. Osborn, invoice, December 3, 1888, Osborn and Dodge Family Papers, box 3, folder 5.
67. There is no comprehensive inventory of the Osborn holdings. The list is drawn from a brief record of artworks distributed to William and Fairfield after Virginia's death in 1902, supplemented by gleanings from letters and publications.
68. Osborn loaned *The Pride of the Village* to the National Academy of Design for display at the 1863 exhibition. The painting was reproduced in the 1864 Artist's Edition of Irving's *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon Gent*.
69. At the sale Sturges purchased Leutze's *Columbus Before Ferdinand and Isabella* (Brooklyn Museum), as well as a Gilbert Stuart portrait.
70. See Spassky et al., *American Paintings in the Metropolitan*, pp. 101–6.
71. In 2005 a painting by Beard from the Osborn collection, *School Rules*, was sold by Sotheby's for \$296,000, setting a price record for the artist. It is puzzling that Earl Shinn did not include the collection in his lavishly illustrated *Art Treasures of America* (Philadelphia, 1879). In 1867 Osborn had merited only a passing mention in Tuckerman's *Book of the Artists*, but by 1879 he had amassed holdings larger than many enumerated by Shinn. This might be explained either by Osborn's dislike of publicity or by his preference for American art at a time when European art was the fashion.
72. Virginia Osborn to Elizabeth Murray, January 8, 1864, Osborn Papers, box 1, folder 6.
73. See Winifred E. Howe, *A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1913), pp. 129–30.
74. *Egyptian Museum. Statement of Its Position and Prospects*. [ca. 1859–60], Manuscripts Department, New-York Historical Society.
75. Walker was appreciated for his rosy, plump, delightful portraits of young children. His Osborn and Sturges portraits are currently unlocated.
76. See Belinda Morse, *John Hanson Walker: The Life and Times of a Victorian Artist* (Gloucester, England, 1987), p. 77.
77. Frederic Church's eldest son, Freddie, also attended Princeton but was expelled for cheating; Virginia Osborn paid off his college gambling debts. This event caused considerable tumult in both families.
78. In 1905 Fairfield Osborn described and named *Tyrannosaurus rex*; in 1925 he testified against William Jennings Bryan, in favor of evolution, in the Scopes "Monkey Trial." His advocacy of eugenics has been heavily criticized.

79. William Church Osborn also served on the board of several railroads, including the Detroit, Toledo, and Ironton Railroad and the El Paso and Southwestern Railroad.
80. Michael Werboff, "Mr. William Church Osborn," July 26, 1980, Osborn Family Archives.
81. Both Havemeyer and Palmer relied on Mary Cassatt as an adviser. In 1886 the first important Impressionist exhibition in the United States was presented in New York City by Paul Durand-Ruel, who then had galleries in Paris and London.
82. Frederick Osborn, *Voyage to a New World, 1889–1979: A Personal Narrative* (Garrison, N.Y., privately printed, 1979), pp. 17–18. Osborn relied on memories of long-past events and made occasional errors. Although his father's Monets were all purchased at Durand-Ruel, the recent rediscovery of a letter from Monet to Alice Osborn, thanking her for supporting Givernois soldiers fighting in World War I, proves that there was direct contact with the artist.
83. American Art Association, *Inventory and Appraisal of Paintings Belonging to William Church Osborn, Esquire Contained in the Residence at No. 40 East 36th Street, New York City*, October 24, 1927, Osborn and Dodge Family Papers, box 9, folder 3.
84. Samuel Marx, untitled estate appraisal of paintings at 720 Park Avenue, New York City and Garrison, New York, [1951?], Osborn Family Archives. Alice predeceased William, so the appraisal includes art from the Dodge family.
85. Henry Thale to William Church Osborn, June 4, 1932, Osborn Family Archives.
86. Durand-Ruel, Inc., *Pictures Belonging to the William Church Osborn Collection*, June 1932, Osborn and Dodge Family Papers, box 9, folder 1.
87. Malvina Hoffman to Frederick H. Osborn, June 4, 1951, Osborn Family Archives. The letter implies that Hoffman designed the Osborns' tomb.
88. William Church Osborn, *Catalogue for Exhibition of Water Colors*, June 25, 1948, Osborn Family Archives. Osborn's estate inventory lists twenty-nine American watercolors, most, if not all, acquired through the American Watercolor Society.
89. Aileen Osborn Webb to William Church Osborn, March 28, [1941], Osborn Family Archives.
90. Albert M. Lythgoe, "The Egyptian Expedition," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 21 (March 1926, pt. 2), pp. 3–4.
91. Osborn was concerned that Blumenthal was the only Jewish trustee and was probably largely responsible for his appointment as president. Calvin Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1970), pp. 218–19.
92. Alice Osborn to Virginia MacKaye, October 21, 1941, Osborn Family Archives.
93. For more than thirty years, Osborn chaired the committee on buildings. R. T. H. Halsey, "William Church Osborn, Eighth President of the Museum," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 36 (August 1941), pp. 162–63.
94. Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces*, pp. 107, 168. His loans of French paintings were the Museum's first significant presentation of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art.
95. Ninety van loads containing a total of 3,500 works of art of various kinds were transported at night in just a few weeks. Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces*, p. 283.
96. Osborn had a lifelong interest in children. He was a trustee of the Children's Aid Society, for forty-eight years serving as president. Under his leadership, the society grew to be largest child-care nonprofit organization in the country. He also supported the New York Society for the Relief of the Ruptured and Crippled, serving as trustee and president. His parents had been active and generous supporters of both organizations.
97. *Zacharias* is the only painting by this visionary artist in the Museum's collection. Other important French paintings from Osborn's collection were donated to Princeton University by his children.
98. See the file "Osborn, William Church, Gifts & Loan," Metropolitan Museum Archives, for relevant information.
99. Testimonial to William Church Osborn, May 16, 1949, Metropolitan Museum Archives.
100. The committee included Cleveland Dodge, Stephen C. Clark, Thomas J. Watson, Ralph Bunche, Herbert H. Lehman, William S. Paley, Nelson Rockefeller, and Francis Cardinal Spellman. "Dedication of the William Church Osborn Memorial Gates of the New Playground in Central Park . . .," 1953, Osborn Family Archives.
101. According to Kathryn Papacosma of the Central Park Conservancy, staff conservators are recasting missing pieces and welding cracks. They are replicating the Group of Deer sculpture that sits atop one of the two granite piers supporting the gates. Both granite piers have been installed at the entrance of the Ancient Playground at Fifth Avenue and Eighty-fifth Street. The gates were originally installed in 1953 in a playground built on the site now occupied by the Metropolitan Museum's Temple of Dendur.
102. For instance, William Church Osborn's great-grandson, Frederick Henry Osborn III, recently retired as director of philanthropic services at the Episcopal Church Foundation. Currently, he serves on the boards of several charitable organizations, notably Scenic Hudson, whose precursor, the Hudson River Conservation Society, was founded by William Church Osborn. Alice Dodge Osborn continued Virginia Osborn's close involvement with the Bellevue Training School for Nurses, serving as president of the Board of Managers. In 1942 Alice and William's daughter Aileen established the American Crafts Council, a direct precursor to the Museum of Arts and Design, the country's premier craft museum. Osborn family members remain closely involved with St. Philip's Church in the Highlands in Garrison, which W. H. and Virginia Osborn first supported in the mid-1800s.