

John Caldwell Calhoun

(1782–1850)

John Caldwell Calhoun served as both a U.S. representative and senator from South Carolina, and as the seventh vice president of the United States. Calhoun was born near Calhoun Mills, Abbeville District (now Mount Carmel, McCormick County), South Carolina. After practicing law, and serving in the state house of representatives from 1808 to 1809, Calhoun was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1810. There he became one of Speaker Henry Clay's principal lieutenants and a leader of the warhawks, a group of young congressmen who advocated war with Great Britain. As chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Calhoun introduced the declaration of war against Britain in June 1812. He served as secretary of war under President James Monroe from 1817 to 1825, was elected vice president with John Quincy Adams in 1824, and was reelected vice president on a ticket with Andrew Jackson in 1828.

To further his opposition to high protective tariffs, Calhoun devised a doctrine of nullification whereby states could declare federal laws null and void within their borders. When President Jackson threatened to use military power to enforce a federal law nullified by South Carolina, Calhoun broke with Jackson. Calhoun resigned the vice presidency in December 1832 in order to fill a vacancy in the U.S. Senate. A powerful advocate for the Southern position, Calhoun supported the institution of slavery and the right of slaveholders to extend the practice into the western territories.

Calhoun resigned from the Senate in 1843 planning to run for president, but instead he served briefly as secretary of state in the cabinet of President John Tyler. He was reelected to the Senate in 1845 and remained there until his death in 1850. Calhoun—along with Daniel Webster and Henry Clay—was part of the “Great Triumvirate” of the Senate’s Golden Age.

When artist Constantino Brumidi designed the walls of the Senate Reception Room in the mid-19th century, he planned five decorative plaster panels, each to contain portraits of “illustrious men.” Brumidi never completed the mural decorations for the room, and the ovals remained blank. In 1955, by resolution of the U.S. Senate, a committee was created to choose five outstanding former senators whose likenesses would fill the ovals. Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts chaired the committee as it sought counsel from historians, political scientists, and senators. From more than 60 nominees, the committee unanimously selected three 19th-century senators: Henry Clay of Kentucky (p. 72), Daniel Webster of Massachusetts (p. 418), and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. It also chose two 20th-century senators, Robert M. La Follette, Sr., of Wisconsin (p. 242) and Robert A. Taft, Sr., of Ohio (p. 354). The committee reported its recommendations to the full Senate in May 1957, and later that year a commission was established to oversee the creation of the portraits. A formal unveiling of the completed works was held on March 12, 1959.

Maryland artist Arthur Conrad, a graduate of the Yale School of Fine Arts, based his painting of John C. Calhoun on a life portrait by George P.A. Healy in the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. Healy created the portrait as a preparatory study for a larger and later painting, *Webster’s Reply to Hayne*. In both of Healy’s works, Calhoun is shown seated in the vice president’s chair in the Senate Chamber. It was from this seat that Calhoun presided in 1830 during the famous Webster-Hayne debate over the nullification doctrine.

Conrad began his portrait of Calhoun in his studio and completed the work after it was installed in the Senate Reception Room. He later executed a replica of the Senate’s portrait for the county courthouse in Abbeville, South Carolina.

John C. Calhoun

Arthur E. Schmalz Conrad (1907-1975)

Oil on canvas applied to wall, 1958

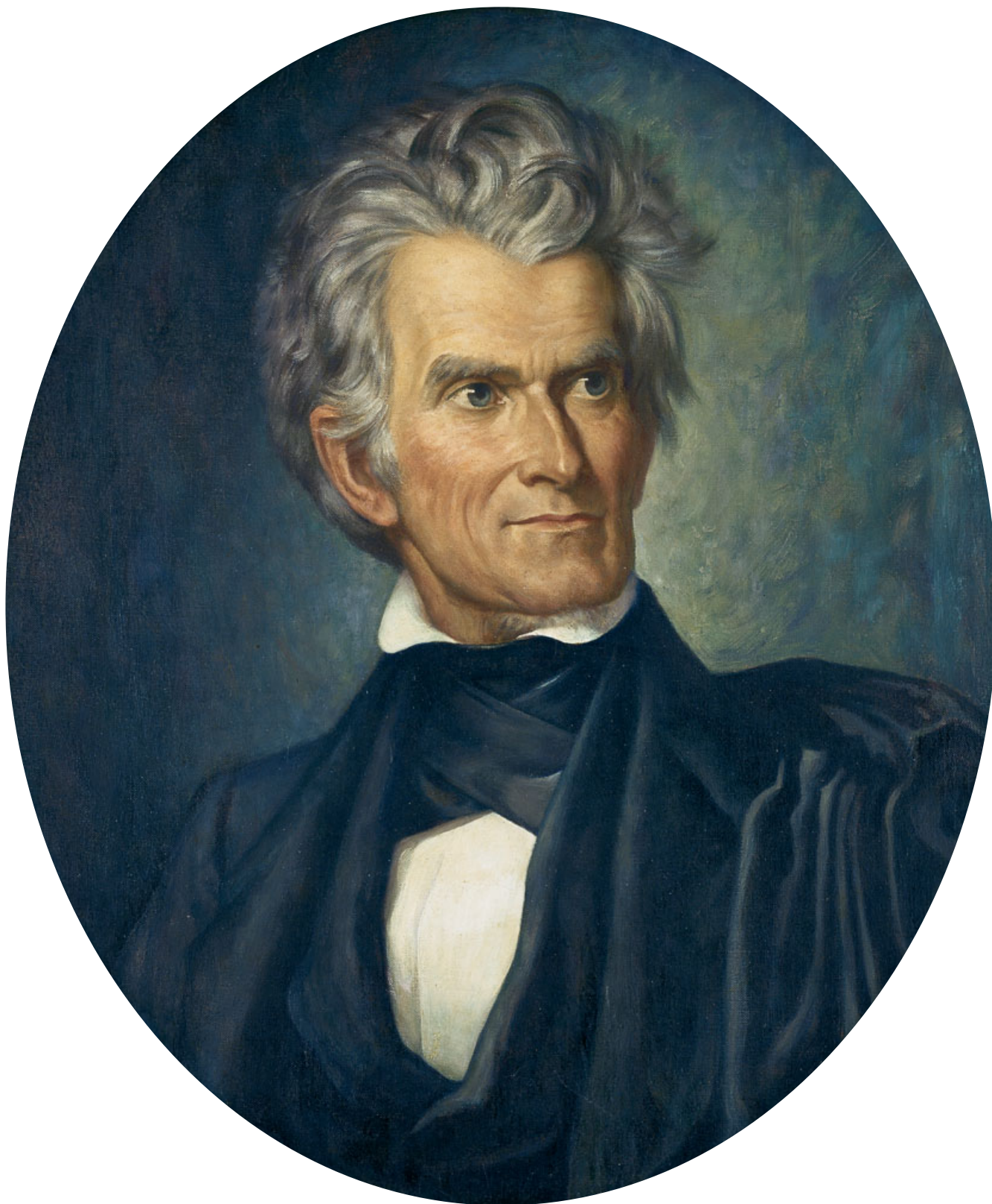
22 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (oval) (57.5 x 49.5 cm)

Unsigned

Commissioned by the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, 1958

Accepted by the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, 1959

Cat. no. 32.00009



America's premier 19th-century photographer, Mathew B. Brady, sold this painting of John C. Calhoun by Henry Darby to the federal government in 1881. Financial reversals had forced Brady to part with this and two other prized oils, those of Henry Clay (p. 76) and Daniel Webster (p. 420). The three had hung together in a prominent position in Brady's elegant photographic gallery on the corner of Broadway and Tenth Street, in New York City. Of the Calhoun portrait, an impressed *New York Times* reviewer noted, "The ragged, wiry character of the face marking nervous energy, [and] the overhanging brow and broad intellectual development [capture] Calhoun at a glance."¹

In 1849 or 1850, shortly before his death, John C. Calhoun and his daughter, Florence Clemson, had stopped by Brady's gallery to have a daguerreotype made. The picture was intended to satisfy his granddaughter's request for an image of him for her locket. Calhoun, now nearing 70, had lost his youthful vigor. Wrote Brady: "His hair, which in his younger days had been dark, and had stood frowningly over his broad, square forehead, was now long and thin and combed back, falling behind his ears. His most outstanding feature was his eye which startled and almost hypnotized me!" During intervals of posing, Brady noted that Calhoun's daughter "delicately arranged her father's hair and the folds of his coat. . . ."²

Later, Brady was to claim that artist Henry Darby had been present for the photography session, making a study for the painting. The evidence is fairly convincing, however, that Darby based his portrait on an existing Brady daguerreotype rather than on direct studies from life. The two often teamed up in this fashion, using a process by which glass negative copies of the daguerreotypes were projected onto sensitized canvas, then "enhanced" with oil paint.

The inscription on the reverse of the canvas—"Calhoun / from Life by Darby / H. F. Darby / 1858"—appears to be contradictory. Calhoun died in 1850, making an 1858 life portrait an impossibility. By 1858, Darby's studio and Brady's photographic gallery were located within the same block of Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. No reference to the oil portrait occurs until that year, when it was exhibited at Brady's National Photographic Art Gallery in Washington, D.C., and again in 1859, when it was shown in New York City at the National Academy of Design. In 1860, one year later, the painting was displayed in Brady's New York Gallery on Broadway. Therefore, it is likely that the inscription date is correct

John C. Calhoun

Henry F. Darby (1829-1897)

Oil on canvas, ca. 1858

49 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 35 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches (126.4 x 90.5 cm)

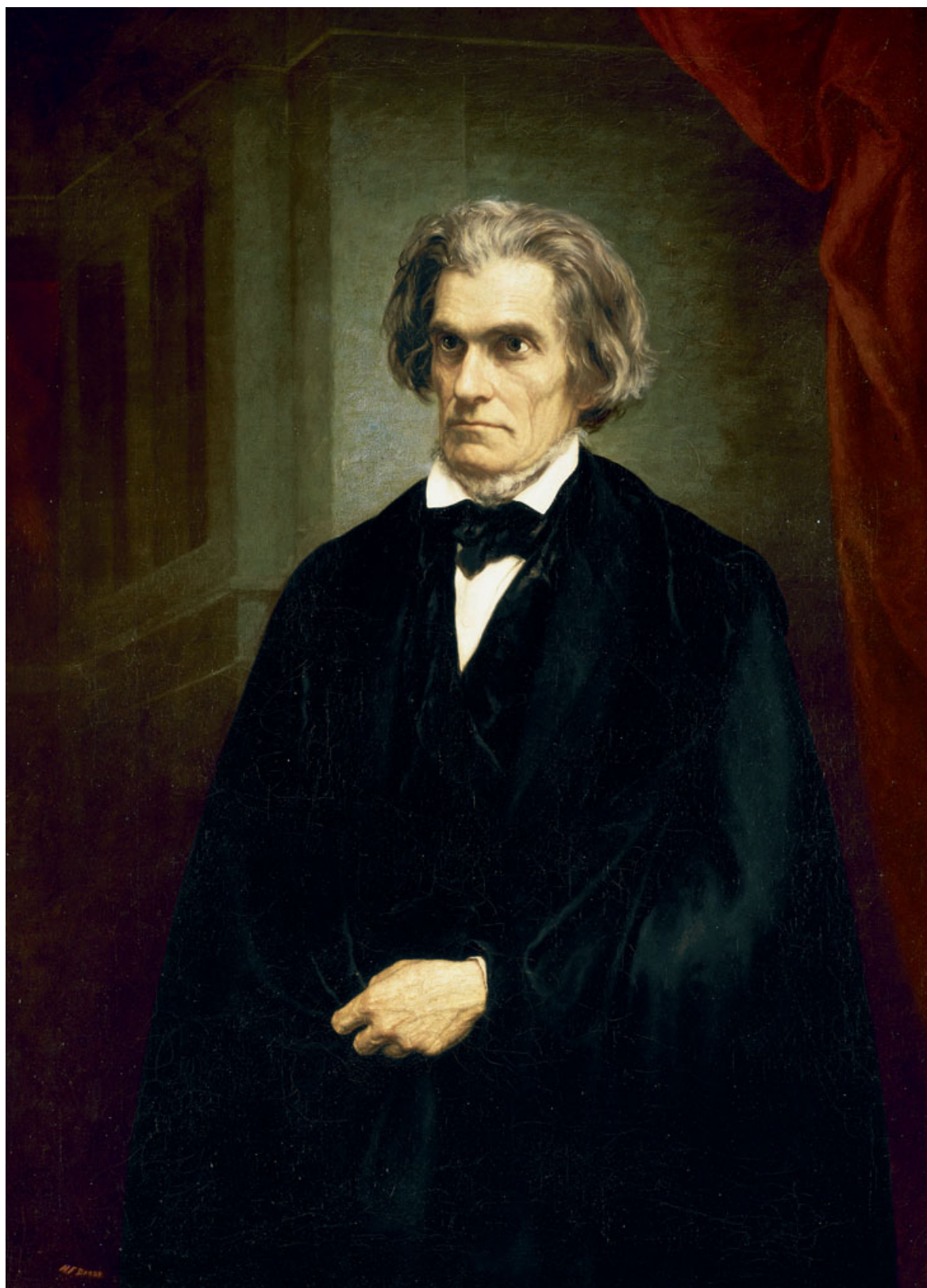
Signed (lower left corner): H. F. DARBY

Inscribed (on back of canvas, centered at bottom): Calhoun / from Life by Darby /

H. F. Darby / 1858

Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1881

Cat. no. 32.00003



and that the painting was indeed made from Brady's daguerreotype, instead of from life.

Henry Darby led a varied career, from self-taught portraitist to ordained minister. Records also indicate that he was an art teacher, served on the National Arts Committee in Washington, D.C., and designed religious altarpieces and clerical attire. While few of his portraits and none of his later historical and religious paintings survive, his work can be found in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute Museum of Art in Utica, New York.

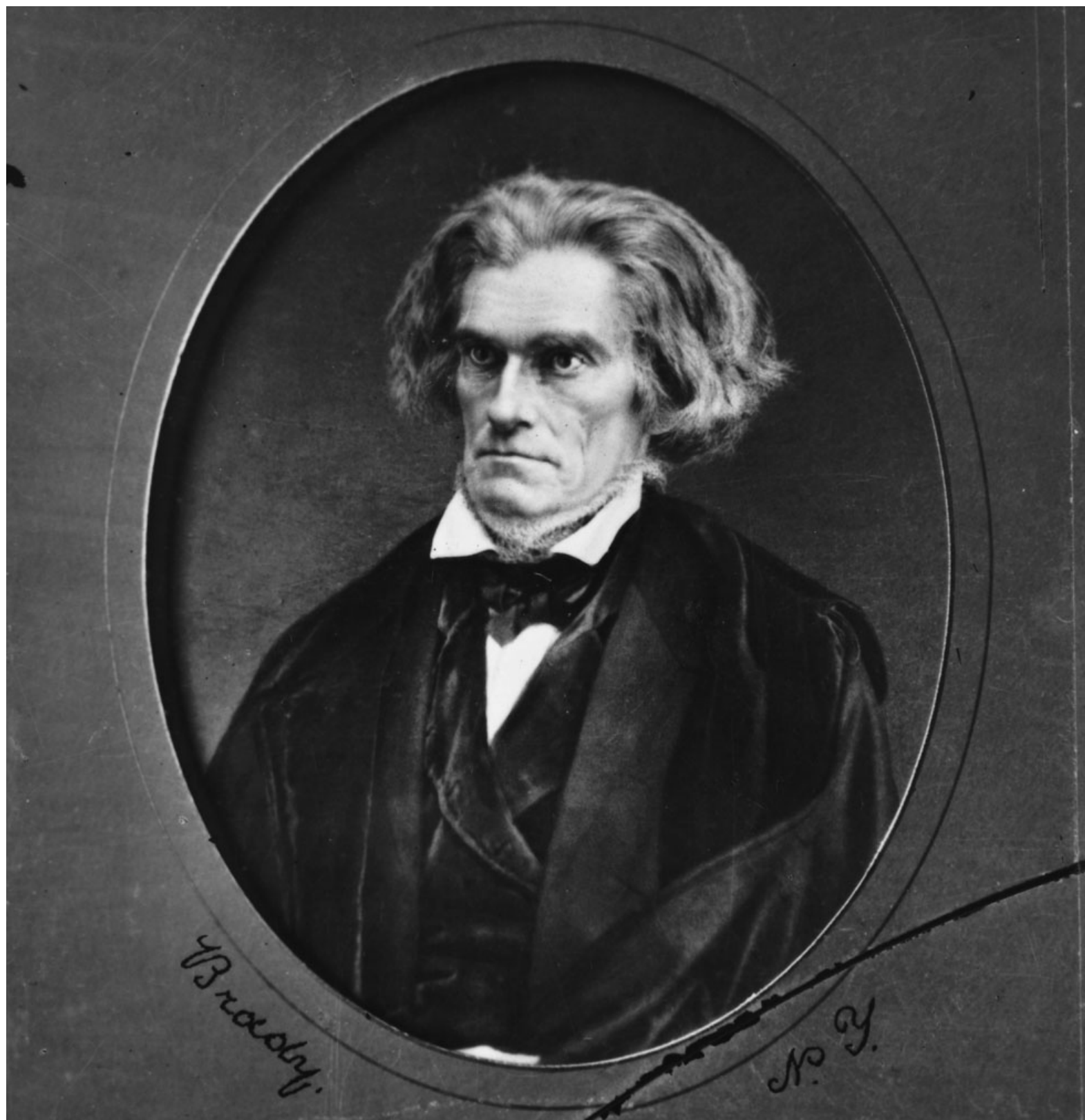
The Senate's painting of Daniel Webster hung prominently in Mathew Brady's photographic gallery along with portraits of Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun, as illustrated in this wood engraving by Albert Berghaus, 1861.

(National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)



The Senate's portrait of John C. Calhoun may have been based on this 1849/1850 daguerreotype by Mathew Brady.

(Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)



Theodore Mills was the son of the noted sculptor Clark Mills, who was renowned for his bronze equestrian statue of Andrew Jackson in Lafayette Park in Washington, D.C. Completed in 1853, it was the first equestrian statue erected in the United States, as well as the first bronze sculpture made in this country. Clark Mills established his foundry in Maryland, where he later cast Thomas Crawford's *Statue of Freedom* for the U.S. Capitol dome. Both Theodore and his brother, Theophilus, assisted their father in his projects, and both became sculptors in their own right.

In the 1840s in South Carolina, Clark Mills developed a method of using life casts from the faces of his sitters in order to simplify the production of portrait busts. His 1846 bust of John C. Calhoun, purchased by the city of Charleston and at that time considered the best likeness of Calhoun, was made from such a life mask. That mask was used 40 years later by his son Theodore, who actively petitioned the Joint Committee on the Library for the commission of the Senate's official vice presidential bust of Calhoun. That Theodore Mills had been born in South Carolina was in his favor, because attempts were traditionally made to choose a sculptor from each vice president's native state. Mills submitted a plaster model and earned the commission in 1895.

Theodore Mills's likeness of Calhoun shows him as slightly gaunt, but there is no sign of the tuberculosis that ravaged the statesman in his last years. The face is most memorable for the deeply drilled eyes, which seem to express somber preoccupation. The resolute head, strongly symmetrical, appears almost to sit on the luxuriant roll of whiskers that lies beneath the jaw. The costume of shirt, cravat, waistcoat, and topcoat is encircled and partly overlaid by a cloak whose heavy folds lend an air of classical gravitas to the bust. Beyond the verifiable likeness and brooding quality, however, Mills adds little to suggest the powerfully conflicting characteristics of this controversial figure who played such a central role in 19th-century American history.

Theodore Mills and his father also modeled a life mask of Abraham Lincoln just 60 days before the president was assassinated in 1865. That mask was eventually donated to the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh by Theodore Mills, then a preparator in the museum's exhibits department. Already known for his Native American groups, the artist was hired in 1898 to create similar figures for the Pittsburgh museum. Mills died in Pittsburgh 18 years later.

John C. Calhoun

Theodore Augustus Mills (1839-1916)

Marble, modeled ca. 1887, carved 1896

30 ¼ x 28 ½ x 17 ½ inches (76.8 x 72.4 x 44.5 cm)

Signed (under subject's truncated right arm): THEO. A. MILLS

Commissioned by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1895

Accepted by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1896

Cat. no. 22.00007

