Daniel Webster

(1782–1852)

One of the nation's greatest orators, Daniel Webster was both a U.S. senator from Massachusetts and a U.S. representative from Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Webster was born in Salisbury, New Hampshire, and gained national prominence as an attorney while serving five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. He successfully argued several notable cases before the Supreme Court of the United States that helped define the constitutional power of the federal government. In *Trustees of Dartmouth College* v. *Woodward*, the Court declared in favor of Webster's alma mater, finding private corporation charters to be contracts and therefore protected from interference by state legislative action. In *McCulloch* v. *Maryland*, the Court upheld the implied power of Congress to charter a federal bank and rejected the right of states to tax federal agencies. Webster also argued the controversial *Gibbons* v. *Ogden* case, in which the Court decided that federal commerce regulations take precedence over the interstate commerce laws of individual states.

After his election to the U.S. Senate in 1827, Webster established his oratorical reputation in the famous 1830 debate with Robert Young Hayne of South Carolina over the issue of states' rights and nullification. Defending the concept of a strong national government, Webster delivered on January 26 and 27 his famous reply to Hayne. "We do not impose geographical limits to our patriotic feeling," he insisted, arguing that every state had an interest in the development of the nation and that senators must rise above local and regional narrow-mindedness. The Constitution is the supreme law of the land, he warned, and any doctrine that allowed states to override the Constitution would surely lead to civil war and a land drenched with "fraternal blood." The motto should not be "Liberty first, and Union afterwards," Webster concluded, but "Liberty *and* Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!" Within weeks of

Thomas Ball had already earned recognition as a painter when he decided in 1850 to devote himself primarily to sculpture. His early pieces were small "cabinet" busts, and Ball's great admiration for Daniel Webster led him to make such a bust of the great orator. Finding the effort unsatisfactory, he destroyed it. Soon afterward, in 1852, he modeled a life-size plaster bust of Webster. While working on this ambitious sculpture, he had his only actual glimpse of Webster when the statesman passed through Boston. Ball stood at his studio door "to have a good look at him."[1] Otherwise, the sculptor was dependent on photographs or paintings for the likeness. Shortly after Ball completed the bust, Webster died, and there was an instant demand for plaster casts of Ball's work. The artist attested that "this bust . . . is the one I have used, without alteration, for my several statues of the great man."[2]

When plans for a publicly commissioned full-length, life-size statue of Webster were rumored, Ball believed he had no chance of obtaining the commission. Therefore, he decided to instead make a statuette that could be replicated to meet the continuing popular demand for Webster images. His first attempt, hastily modeled using an umbrella stick as an armature, collapsed. Everything but the head was broken. Ball started again with an iron armature, and produced the clay statuette of which the Senate's statue is a bronze cast. For Ball, and apparently for others, "there was something in it, I hardly know what it was, that hit hard."[3]

On the first day the statuette was exhibited, Ball received an offer of $500 for the model and the reproduction rights. He accepted "with avidity," and the patent was subsequently assigned on August 9, 1853, to George W. Nichols of New York City. Nichols, an art dealer, must have profited greatly from the statuette. Ball, content with the recognition, never regretted selling the patent.

To produce the series of bronze replicas, Nichols engaged the J.T. Ames Foundry in Chicopee, Massachusetts. Ames was the first foundry in America to produce bronze statues, and Ball's *Webster* is perhaps the earliest statuette to be patented and cast in bronze in a large edition. Nichols's first initial, as it appears on the base of the statuette, has often been incorrectly read as *C* rather than *G*, and his first name seems to have gone undiscovered until now. The design patent (no. 590) issued for this figure clearly states that T. Ball is the assignor of the patent to George W. Nichols, of New York, New York. A drawing

Daniel Webster

Thomas Ball (1819–1911)

Bronze, 1853
30¼ x 12⅝ x 11 inches (including base) (76.8 x 32.1 x 27.9 cm)
Signed and dated (on back of draped column): T Ball Sculpt / Boston Mass / 1853
Inscribed (on back of draped column): Patent assigned / G W Nichols
Gift of The Charles Engelhard Foundation in honor of Senator Mike Mansfield, 1987
Accepted by the U.S. Senate Commission on Art, 1987
Cat. no. 24.00006

the debate, Webster had become a national hero. His Senate oration was in greater demand than any other congressional speech in American history. Webster then served a distinguished term as secretary of state from 1841 to 1843, negotiating the Webster-Ashburton Treaty that settled a dispute over the boundary between the U.S. and Canada. He later returned to the Senate, where he championed American industry and opposed free trade.

If Webster's impassioned oratory was legendary, it was intensified by his unforgettable physical presence. Dark in complexion, with penetrating eyes—often likened to glowing coals—he had an electrifying effect on anyone who saw him. Nineteenth-century journalist Oliver Dyer wrote: "The God-like Daniel . . . had broad shoulders, a deep chest, and a large frame. . . . The head, the face, the whole presence of Webster, was kingly, majestic, godlike."[1]

Increasingly concerned with the sectional controversy threatening the Union, Webster supported Henry Clay's Compromise of 1850. On March 7, 1850, he delivered one of his most important and controversial Senate addresses. Crowds flocked to the Senate Chamber to hear Webster plead the Union's cause, asking for conciliation and understanding: "I wish to speak today not as a Massachusetts man, nor as a Northern man, but as an American. . . . I speak today for the preservation of the Union. Hear me for my cause." Webster's endorsement of the compromise—including its fugitive slave provisions—helped win its eventual enactment, but doomed the senator's cherished presidential aspirations. Webster became secretary of state again in 1850, and he died two years later at his home in Marshfield, Massachusetts.

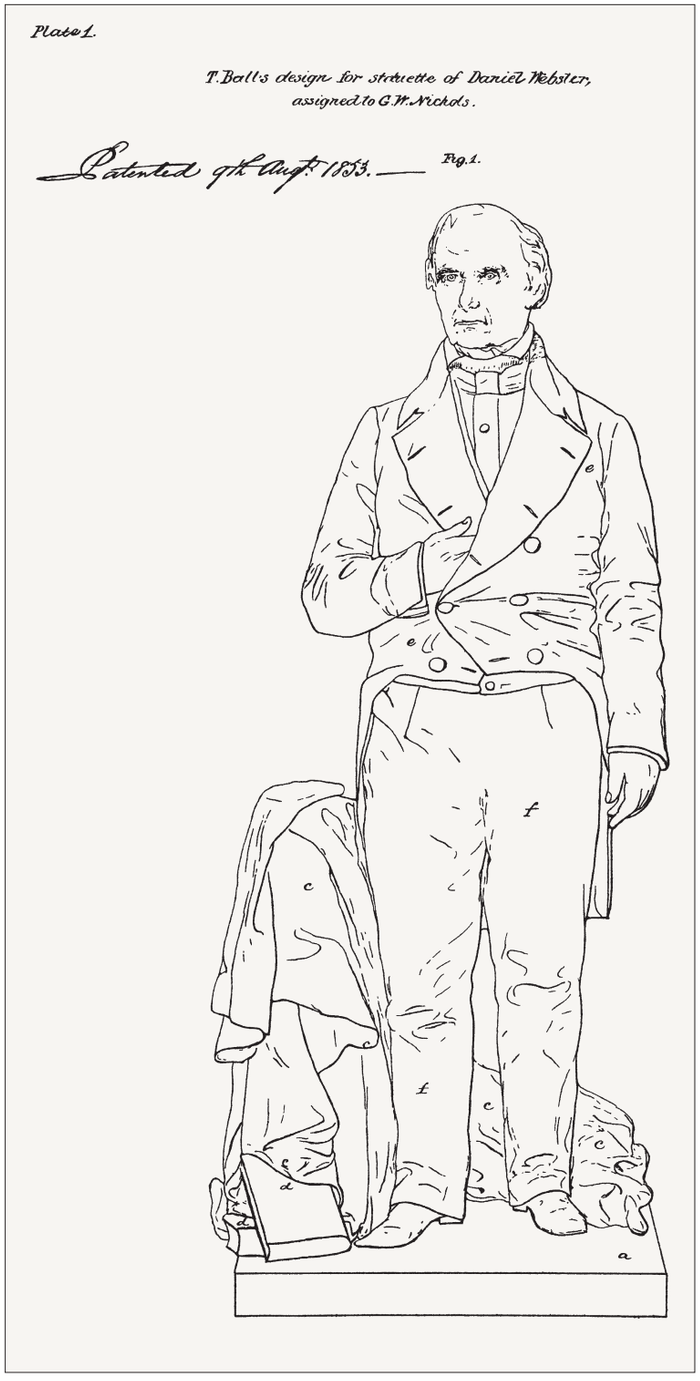
from the Design Patent Examiner's Room at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office confirms the identity of the piece.

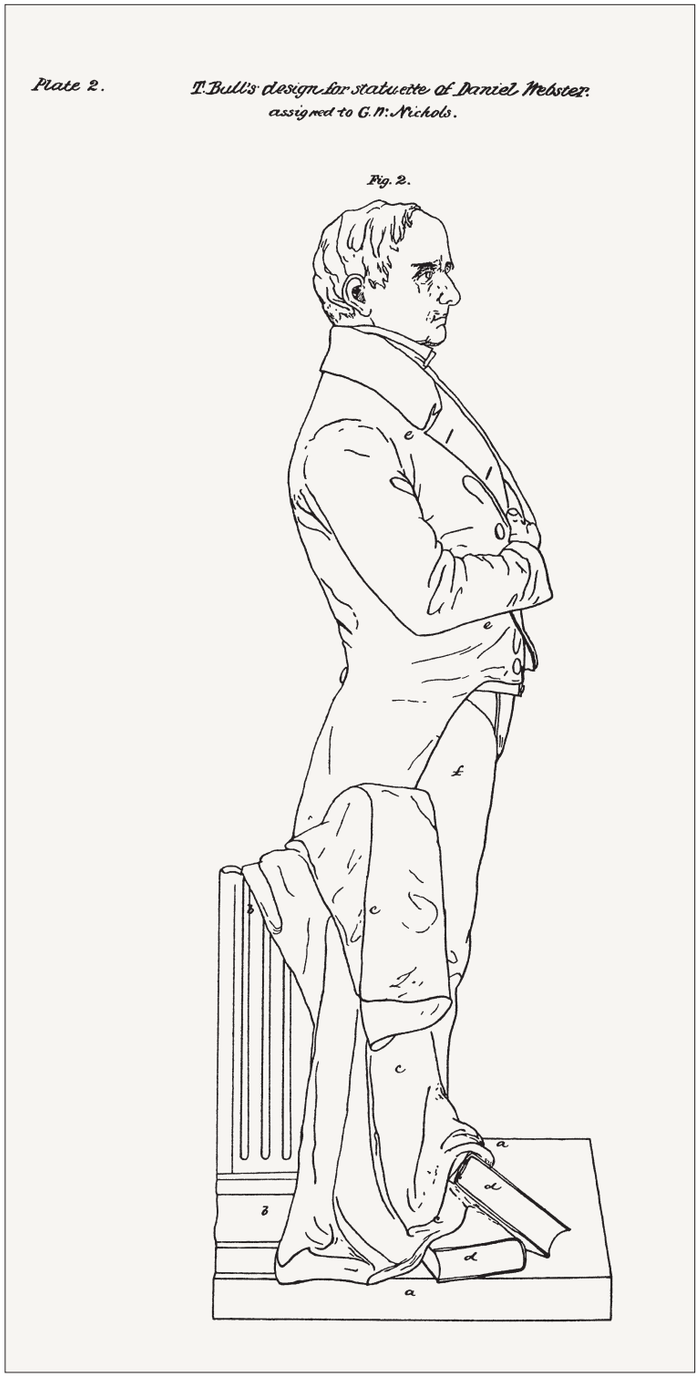
The truncated column beside Webster and the two books at the base are standard iconographic attributes. The books represent Rhetoric—that is, eloquence—in tribute to Webster's formidable oratorical powers. The column stands for Fortitude and Constancy, in reference to Webster's unswerving dedication to the preservation of the Union.

Lorado Taft, the American sculptor and historian, wrote appreciatively about Thomas Ball and his sculpture. Although acknowledging a monotony in the surface treatment of much of Ball's sculpture, Taft stresses the "essential nobility" of his "dignified and monumental" work, concluding that "in the whole output...there is not one hint of the meretricious or the commercial."[4] Ball would seem the right sculptor to have captured Webster's "essential nobility." But the potent effect of Webster's physical and psychological presence on his contemporaries is not easy to comprehend from most of the portraits of him, including (despite the acclaim it received) this one by Ball. Probably only modern motion-picture photography could have recorded Webster as his contemporaries saw him in action, for almost every painting or sculpture of him seems drained of his "measureless power."

"I have seen men larger; but I never saw anyone who *looked* so large and grand as he did when he was aroused in debate," wrote journalist Oliver Dyer in 1889.[5] But Ball's bust presents a rather stout, stolid Webster. The tailcoat stretches across his midriff and his pose is frontal and unanimated—only the massive head conveys something of his intellectual force. Dyer recalled that "Webster's head was phenomenal in size . . . and grandeur of appearance" and that "his brow was so protuberant that his eyes, though unusually large, seemed sunken, and were likened unto 'great burning lamps set deep in the mouths of caves.'"[6] Ball's bronze captures this crowning aspect of Webster, and perhaps this was the "something in it . . . that hit hard."

The commercial success of the Webster statuette encouraged Ball to model a companion piece of Henry Clay (p. 64) in 1858. In 1876 Ball returned to Webster, his favorite subject, modeling a 14-foot likeness. Cast in Munich, it was a modified enlargement of his earlier statuette. It stands in New York City's Central Park on a prominent site near the entrance at Seventy-second Street and Central Park West.





Thomas Ball assigned the patent, represented by these two figure drawings, for his Daniel Webster statuette to George W. Nichols on August 9, 1853.
(Courtesy U.S. Patent and Trademark Office)

Artist Adrian Lamb with Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson at the unveiling ceremony for the Daniel Webster painting in the Senate Reception Room, March 12, 1959.
(Peter A. Juley & Son Collection, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)

To complete the decorative plaster panels in the Senate Reception Room of the U.S. Capitol that had been left vacant since the late 19th century, the Special Committee on the Senate Reception Room was established in 1955. The Senate charged the committee with selecting "five outstanding persons from among all persons, but not a living person, who have served as Members of the Senate since the formation of the Government of the United States." Paintings of these individuals would then "be placed in the five unfilled spaces in the Senate reception room."[1]

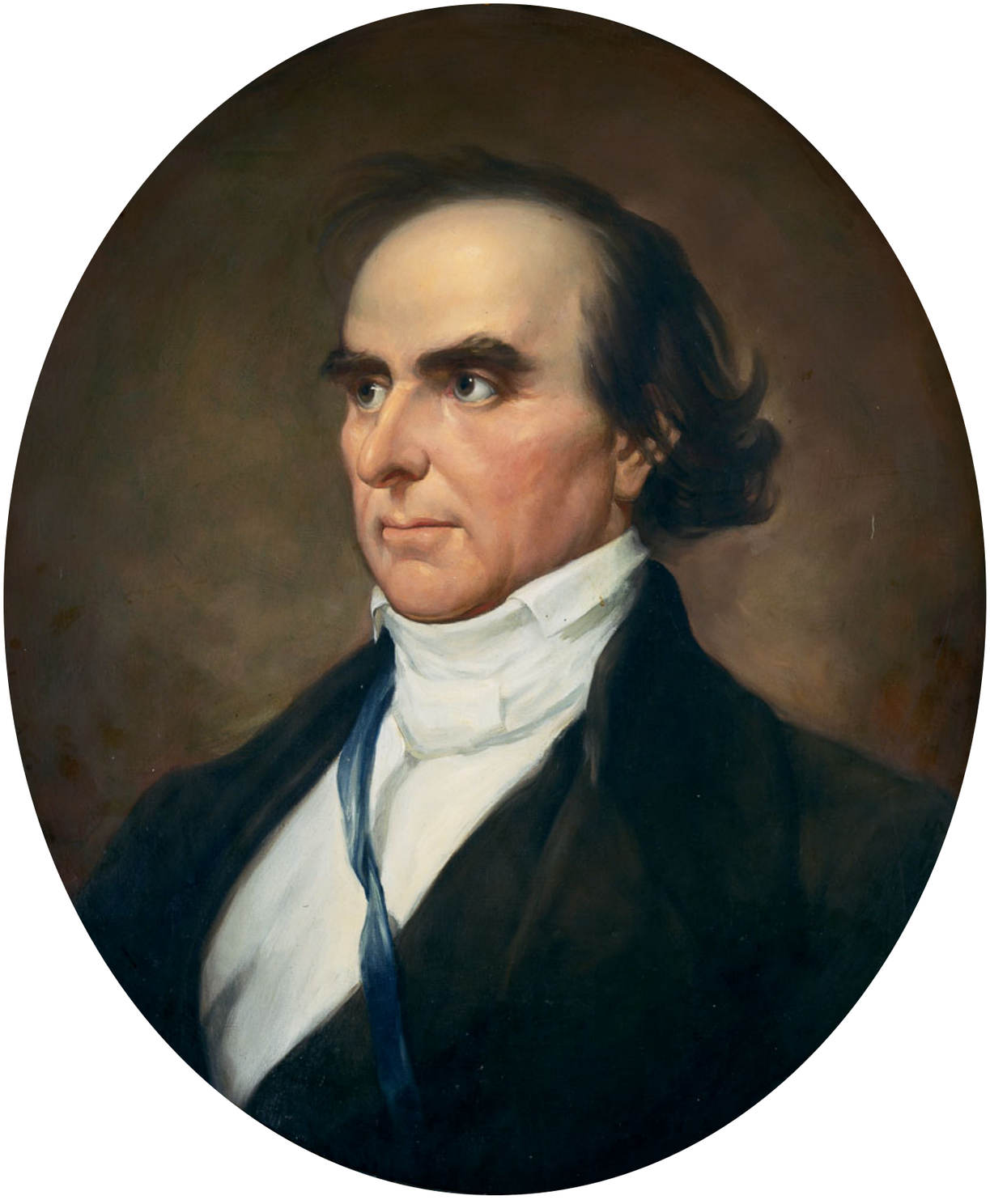
The committee consisted of four senior senators and one freshman senator. Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the freshman, John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, to be the committee's chairman. Kennedy was an ideal choice; his popular book, *Profiles in Courage*, skillfully examined the careers of eight outstanding former senators. The Kennedy committee spent two years surveying the nation's leading historians and political scientists, and easily identified three 19th-century senators: Henry Clay of Kentucky (p. 72), John C. Calhoun of South Carolina (p. 54), and Daniel Webster of Massachusetts. After much debate, the committee also selected two 20th-century members: Robert M. La Follette, Sr., of Wisconsin (p. 242) and Robert A. Taft, Sr., of Ohio (p. 354). A special Senate commission, composed of experts in the art field, then selected artists for the five paintings, including Adrian Lamb of New York for the portrait of Daniel Webster. The commission determined that Lamb, like the other artists, should "copy some suitable existing portrait or other likeness of his particular subject."[2] Lamb based his painting on an existing oil by George P.A. Healy in the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. The original portrait, made during a sitting from life in 1848 at Webster's country home in Marshfield, Massachusetts, had served as a preliminary study for Healy's monumental historical painting *Webster's Reply to Hayne* in Faneuil Hall in Boston. The Virginia museum's Webster likeness was one of four life studies of the senator executed by Healy during a six-year period.

Adrian Lamb studied at the Art Students League in New York City and at the Académie Julian in Paris before embarking on a career as a portraitist. Lamb's works are found in many collections, including the White House, the Smithsonian Institution, the U.S. Naval Academy, Harvard University, and the Supreme Court of the United States. For much of his life, Lamb resided in Connecticut and maintained a studio in Manhattan.

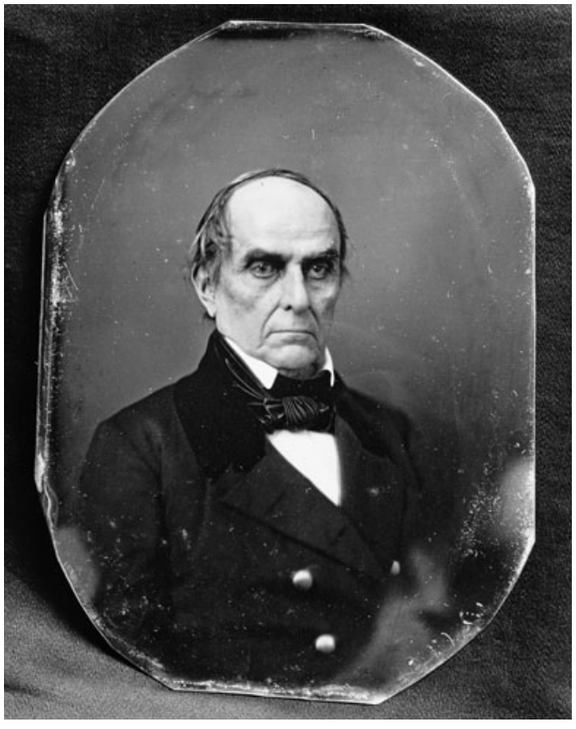
Daniel Webster

Adrian S. Lamb (1901–1988)

Oil on canvas applied to wall, 1958-
22⅝ x 19½ 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. 32.00006-



This oil on canvas portrait of Daniel Webster has been in the Senate since it was purchased from 19th-century photographer Mathew Brady in 1881. The picture was acquired together with canvases of Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun; all three are believed to have been based on Brady daguerreotypes of the senators. The paintings were exhibited for many years at Brady's New York City photographic gallery and later at his studio in Washington, D.C. Shortly before he sold the three portraits to the government, Brady was forced to use them as collateral for a loan. Documents indicate that he later paid the loan and therefore retained ownership of the paintings.



This ca. 1849 Mathew Brady daguerreotype of Daniel Webster is similar in pose to the Senate's portrait.
(Photographic History Collection, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, negative number: 71–2772)

The portraits of Clay (p. 76) and Calhoun (p. 56) are known to be the work of Henry Darby, but Webster's portrait is unsigned. It is believed to have been executed by the painter Richard Francis Nagle. Nagle was born and trained in Dublin, Ireland. He immigrated to the United States and is known for portraits of several New York natives, including likenesses of Generals Winfield Scott and Ulysses S. Grant. A Nagle descendant claimed that the artist had been acquainted with Mathew Brady. Indeed, the New-York Historical Society's collection contains a portrait of Brady—albeit not from life—by Nagle.

Brady himself ascribed the Webster painting to an artist named Nagle in an 1881 signed statement to the Joint Committee on the Library: "Webster visited my gallery in June 1849. . . . Five different sittings were made on this occasion—Nagle the artist of New York—made his study for the painting at the same time." Although it cannot be verified that Nagle actually lived in New York City, his portraits connect the artist to that region. Moreover, the Webster painting bears stylistic resemblances to many of Nagle's other works.

This painting was previously misattributed to the better known Philadelphia artist John Neagle, an apparent error made by a clerk in the U.S. Capitol in the 19th century. No documentary evidence exists to link the picture to this artist, nor does the painting resemble other works by John Neagle.

Daniel Webster

Attributed to Richard Francis Nagle (1835–ca. 1891)

Oil on canvas, ca. 1849-
49⅝ x 39⅜ inches (126 x 100 cm)-
Unsigned-
Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1881-
Cat. no. 32.00001-

Although little is known about this full-length portrait of Daniel Webster by James Henry Wright, it was probably based on one of the many daguerreotypes or engravings of Webster that were in circulation during the 19th century. It is signed but undated. On September 21, 1944, Senator Alben W. Barkley of Kentucky, Senate majority leader and chairman of the Joint Committee on the Library, introduced a resolution authorizing acceptance of the Webster portrait as a gift from Lester Martin, a prominent textile industrialist and philanthropist in New York City. The resolution was adopted by unanimous consent.

Wright, who maintained a studio at 835 Broadway, was a popular 19th-century New York artist specializing in portraiture, still lifes, and landscapes. Between 1842 and 1860 he exhibited in New York City at the National Academy of Design and at the American Art Union. Other Wright portraits include prominent mid-19th-century Americans, among them General Winfield Scott and Matthew Vassar, founder of Vassar College.

Daniel Webster

James Henry Wright (1813–1883)

Oil on canvas, date unknown-
85⅛ x 65¼ inches (216.2 x 165.7 cm)-
Signed (lower right corner): J H Wright / N.Y.-
Gift of Lester Martin, 1944-
Accepted by Senate resolution dated September 21, 1944-
Cat. no. 32.00017-