

Charles Curtis

(1860–1936)

Born near Topeka, Kansas, Charles Curtis—who would become a U.S. representative, senator, and vice president—was directly descended from White Plume, a Kaw chief, and Pawhuska, an Osage chief. During his boyhood, Curtis lived for three years with his maternal grandmother on the Kaw reservation near Council Grove, Kansas. As the government prepared to remove the Kaws to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), young Curtis’s grandmother urged him to seek educational and career opportunities away from the tribe. Following high school in Topeka, he studied law there and at the age of 21 was admitted to the bar, soon rising to county attorney.

In 1892 Curtis was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and was returned six times. He moved to the U.S. Senate in 1907 to fill an unexpired term. Closely identifying with his ancestry, Curtis authored legislation beneficial to Native Americans during his 20 years in the Senate. He also served as chairman of the Committee on Indian Depredations. Curtis was an indefatigable political organizer; he became party whip, and was majority leader between 1925 and 1929. One of his proudest achievements in the Senate was his effort to gain passage of the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote. Elected 31st vice president with Republican Herbert Hoover in 1928, Curtis served one term before being defeated for reelection. He then returned to the practice of law in Washington, D.C., where he died in 1936.

Sculptor Moses Dykaar submitted a plaster model of Charles Curtis to the vice president in 1932 and received approval to execute the bust in marble for the Senate’s Vice Presidential Bust Collection. Born in Lithuania, Dykaar studied art in Paris, where he soon gained a reputation as a sculptor of note. After immigrating to the United States, he established himself as a master sculptor of expressive portrait busts. “Just a handsome or a pretty face will not do,” Dykaar told a reporter in 1932. “It isn’t the likeness that counts in sculpture. We try to make the physical features we carve in marble show the mental and spiritual attributes of the person, and if we do not do that we fail utterly.”¹

Unlike many sculptors, Dykaar carried out his own translations of models into marble, but he died before he could undertake the final work on his likeness of Curtis. The sculptor’s widow arranged for the well-known New York firm of Piccirilli Brothers to make the carving, and it was delivered to the Senate in 1935.

Dykaar also created busts of Calvin Coolidge (p. 84) and Thomas Marshall (p. 276) for the Senate’s Vice Presidential Bust Collection. His vigorous marble sculptures of prominent early 20th-century Americans

can be found at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., and in a number of other collections throughout the United States.



Charles Curtis in his vice presidential office in the Senate Office Building.

(Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

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Moses A. Wainer Dykaar (1884-1933)

Marble, modeled 1929, carved 1934

23 x 21 x 13 inches (58.4 x 53.3 x 33 cm)

Signed and dated (on subject's truncated left arm): MOSES / DYKAAR / 1929

Commissioned by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1934

Accepted by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1935

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