

# Charles Sumner

(1811-1874)

Charles Sumner, a U.S. senator from Massachusetts and a passionate abolitionist, was born in Boston. After law school he spent time in Washington, D.C., where he met with Chief Justice John Marshall and listened to Henry Clay debate in the Senate Chamber. Unimpressed with the politics of Washington, he returned to Massachusetts, where he practiced law, lectured at Harvard Law School, and published in the *American Jurist*. Following a three-year study tour of Europe, Sumner resumed his law practice with little enthusiasm. Then, in 1845, he was invited to make a public Independence Day speech in Boston. This event was a turning point in his career, and he soon became widely known as an eloquent orator.

Six years later, Sumner was elected to the U.S. Senate by a coalition of Free-Soilers and Democrats. A strong opponent of slavery, he denounced the Fugitive Slave Law and attacked the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which repealed the Missouri Compromise by giving territories north of latitude 36°30' (the southern border of Missouri) the option of legalizing slavery. Sumner's strong political opinions brought angry reactions from Southern senators and branded him a radical. In the mid-1850s, the senator was influential in organizing the Republican Party. On May 20, 1856, he delivered his famous Senate speech, "The Crime against Kansas." Calling the Kansas-Nebraska Act a "swindle," Sumner also denounced Senators Andrew P. Butler of South Carolina and Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. Two days later, Butler's cousin, Representative Preston Brooks of South Carolina, beat Sumner over the head with a cane on the floor of the Senate, severely injuring him.

During the next three and a half years, Sumner tried to recover from the assault. In 1857, despite his absence from Capitol Hill, the Massachusetts legislature unanimously reelected Sumner to the Senate. He returned to Washington, D.C., in 1859 and again took up the abolitionist cause, delivering a speech on the "Barbarism of Slavery." Appointed chairman of the

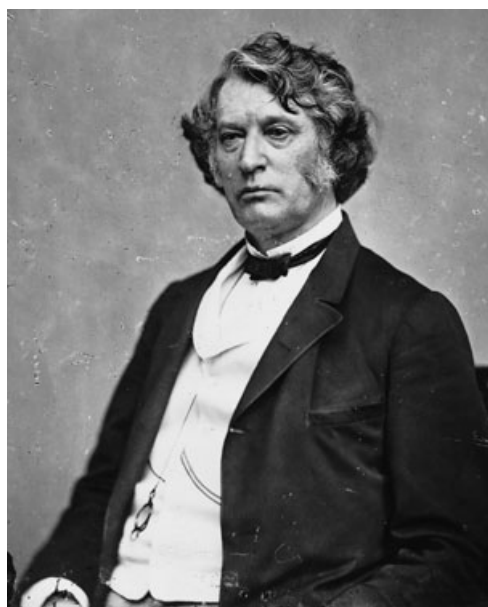
With his large head, thick hair and muttonchops, and broad torso, abolitionist Charles Sumner presented a powerful image. This likeness of Sumner by Walter Ingalls resembles in several regards an 1860 "Imperial" photograph (24 x 20 inches) by Mathew Brady.

The photograph, like the painting, shows Sumner facing left. His body is at a three-quarter angle so that the torso opens up, revealing an expanse of white waistcoat, watch fob, and folding eyeglasses suspended from a slender cord or chain. However, Ingalls repositioned the head into profile and also placed the disproportionately short left thigh parallel to the picture plane. The conflict of the planar head and thigh with the angled torso is awkward and distracting. The profile head (with less unruly hair than in the photograph) is, however, calm and pensive, and its greater formality is seconded by the books and papers on the table.

According to an unsigned document among the records of the Joint Committee on the Library, Sumner sat for Ingalls in 1873 in a temporary studio at the U.S. Capitol. The resulting portrait was purchased by the committee in 1886, 12 years after Sumner's death.

Walter Ingalls, a prolific portrait artist, was born in Canterbury, New Hampshire in 1805. He was self-taught and widely traveled, and his genial

personality won him such celebrated clients as scientist Louis Agassiz and Pope Pius IX. Ingalls usually spent part of each year in Washington, D.C., and he died in the nearby town of Oakland, Maryland, in 1874. A number of his paintings are held by the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord.



**This photograph of Charles Sumner was taken in Mathew Brady's Washington, D.C., studio around 1860.**

(Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

*Charles Sumner*

**Walter Ingalls (1805-1874)**

Oil on canvas, 1873

43<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (111.4 x 89.9 cm)

Signed and dated (lower right corner): W Ingalls / Pinxt / 1873

Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1886

Cat. no. 32.00016



Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in 1861, Sumner played an important role in avoiding violent conflict with Great Britain and France during the crucial opening phase of the Civil War. He supported President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, and, during the Reconstruction Era after the Civil War, he focused his efforts on securing equal rights for African Americans. Sumner disagreed strongly with President Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction plans and played a major role in the move to impeach him. Sumner likewise differed with President Ulysses Grant on many postwar issues. Grant retaliated by persuading the Republican conference to remove Sumner as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee in 1871. After Sumner died suddenly of a heart attack in March 1874, his body lay in state in the Rotunda of the Capitol. His greatest role in the U.S. Senate was his tireless advocacy of civil rights for African American citizens.

**M**artin Milmore immigrated to Boston from his native Ireland when he was seven. He took art lessons at the Lowell Institute and then learned to carve in wood and stone from his older brother Joseph. He entered the studio of Thomas Ball in his early teens and stayed until the mid-1860s, when he began receiving commissions and established his own studio in Boston. Apparently, his first independently produced sculptures were cabinet-size busts of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord) and Charles Sumner (whereabouts unknown), both modeled from life about 1863. By his 20th birthday Milmore had received a commission for three giant figures for Boston's Horticultural Hall. The project had first been offered to Ball as he was about to leave for Italy, and Ball suggested his protégé instead. Notable portrait commissions followed, as did commissions for Civil War monuments in and around Boston. Milmore also designed (and his brother Joseph carved) the colossal *American Sphinx*, commissioned by Jacob Bigelow to guard the Bigelow Chapel in Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Milmore Americanized Egypt's Sphinx by replacing the asp on the headdress with the American eagle; the intention of the piece was to commemorate the preservation of the Union and the destruction of slavery.

This spate of work culminated in the commission for the *Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument* for the Boston Common, erected in 1877. To prepare for this huge project, Milmore went to Rome. It must have been there that an additional commission from the Massachusetts legislature for a bust of the late Charles Sumner—the one now in the Senate—reached him. Milmore was probably chosen for the commission because of the reputation his cabinet-size bust of Sumner had attained. Milmore then enlarged this earlier bust in his studio in Rome in 1875 (a frequently cited date of 1865 is thought to be the result of an error by Lorado Taft in his well-known *History of American Sculpture*).

On Senator Sumner's sudden death in 1874, his body lay in state in the Capitol Rotunda, and he was widely eulogized. In Boston, George William Curtis, social reformer and editor of *Harper's Weekly*, delivered such a splendid eulogy before the Massachusetts legislature that, according to his widow, Anna Shaw Curtis, the members gave Curtis this bust of Sumner. Inscribed on the back of the socle are the words "Commonwealth / of / Massachusetts to / George William Curtis." Curtis

*Charles Sumner*

**Martin Milmore (1844-1883)**

Marble, 1875

30½ x 36 x 16¼ inches (77.5 x 91.4 x 41.3 cm)

Inscribed (centered on back): COMMONWEALTH / OF / MASSACHUSETTS TO / GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

Signed and dated (centered on back): MARTIN. MILMORE. / SCULPTOR. / ROME 1875

Gift of Anna Shaw Curtis (widow of George William Curtis), 1894

Accepted by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1894

Cat. no. 21.00017



died in 1892, and his widow offered the bust to the Senate, where it was accepted by unanimous consent on January 26, 1894.

Sumner was about 52 when he sat for Milmore, and this is the age preserved in both the 1863 cabinet-size and 1875 life-size busts. The Roman toga, a manner out of favor by 1875, is also preserved from the early bust. Milmore not only captured the appearance of the famous orator-advocate with his careful naturalism but also created an aura of the greatness of the man.

The large, slightly fleshy features are instilled with a certain animation that is lacking, for example, in the painted portrait by Walter Ingalls (p. 346). The substantial amount of cutting and drilling in the curly hair and muttonchops is similar to Sumner's unruly appearance preserved in a number of Mathew Brady's period photographs of Sumner. That unruliness is analogous to the intense, unrestrained passion of his oratory when devoted to the single cause of emancipation and equal suffrage.

In the years following Sumner's death, his renown seemed only to increase. As he made the rounds of American sculptors in Florence in 1878, Ulysses S. Grant entered Thomas Ball's studio. Seeing him at work on a statue of Sumner, Grant exclaimed: "Charles Sumner! That's the fourth Sumner I've seen this morning!"<sup>1</sup>

In 1883 Milmore died at the age of 38. Daniel Chester French, the distinguished American sculptor, carved and erected at his grave a memorial tribute entitled *Death and the Sculptor* (p. 430).



**Artist Martin Milmore.**  
(Architect of the Capitol)

***Right:***

**The marble bust of Charles Sumner by Martin Milmore is displayed on the third floor of the U.S. Capitol, just outside the Senate Chamber gallery.**

(2002 photograph)

