

Charles Stebbins Fairchild Class of 1863, Law 1865 by Cecilia Beaux

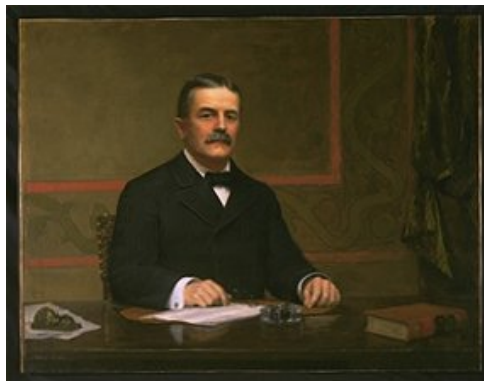
Fairchild was the 16th President of the Club, having been a member since its earliest days.

In the first three decades of the 20th century, Cecilia Beaux was considered along with John Singer Sargent, one of America's most prominent portrait artists.

Charles Fairchild was born in Cazenovia, New York, in 1842, and after finishing his law degree at Harvard in 1865 he joined his father's law firm in Albany. He soon became active in Democratic politics, and in 1874 Governor Samuel Tilden appointed him deputy attorney general of New York. In that position he was involved with the prosecution of corrupt police commissioners.

One year later he was promoted to attorney general and led the prosecution of the canal ring, a group of corrupt contractors and their political supporters who defrauded the state of New York by overcharging for repairs and improvements of the state's canal system. This fraud peaked in 1872, when appropriations for repairs rose to \$4.1 million. Even with Fairchild's efforts, the canal ring was not eradicated and Tammany Hall continued its control of the party.

Fairchild returned to private practice until 1885, when Grover Cleveland was elected President. He appointed Fairchild to the post of assistant secretary of the Treasury and two years later he became secretary of the Treasury, also in the Cleveland administration. As secretary he took charge of a financial situation that required ad hoc and innovative policy action, in some ways parallel to the federal response to COVID-19 and the crash of 2008. In 1886, the Treasury ran a surplus of \$94 million, almost 40% of total government spending. Fairchild believed that conditions called for economic stimulus, so he sought to reduce this budget surplus. However, Congress refused either to lower taxes or to raise spending, and therefore, Fairchild unilaterally used the surplus to buy back outstanding government bonds, as a way of injecting cash into the private economy. Some economists believe that his actions, which anticipate the Federal Reserve's anti-recession tactics since 2008, prevented a financial panic. Fairchild was removed from office when Cleveland lost the election of 1888.



Official U.S. Treasury Portrait of Fairchild, by Robert C. Hinckley 1889

When Cleveland regained the Presidency in 1892, Fairchild refused to return to Washington. He continued to live in New York, and became a prominent figure in business and philanthropy.

Fairchild was a Harvard Club member from its earliest days and elected Club president in 1901. During his tenure the Club began plans to enlarge the Clubhouse to include Harvard Hall and the six floors above it. He served for four years to see the project through, and the new building was inaugurated under his leadership.

After his death in 1924, Fairchild's widow, Helen Lincklaen Fairchild endowed the Charles Stebbins Fairchild Professorship of Public Law at Harvard; the current holder of the Chair is Andrew Kaufman.

Fairchild's presidential portrait entered the Club's collection in 1905, a time when securing a portrait by Cecilia Beaux was a mark of social prestige.

Cecilia Beaux was born in Philadelphia in 1855. Her father was a silk manufacturer from France, and her mother a teacher from New York. Her mother died tragically young-- twelve days after her birth-- and her heartbroken father returned to France, leaving Cecilia and her older sister Etta, to be raised by their grandmother and two aunts. Her father returned to America irregularly over the following 16 years, and died in France in 1884. Cecilia grew up in a household of women who supported themselves.

Cecilia's artistic talent was recognized when she was a young girl, and she took art classes that were available to women at that time. By eighteen she was earning her living through teaching art and through sales of lithographs and portraits of children painted on china plates.



Platter, 1880, Metropolitan Museum of Art

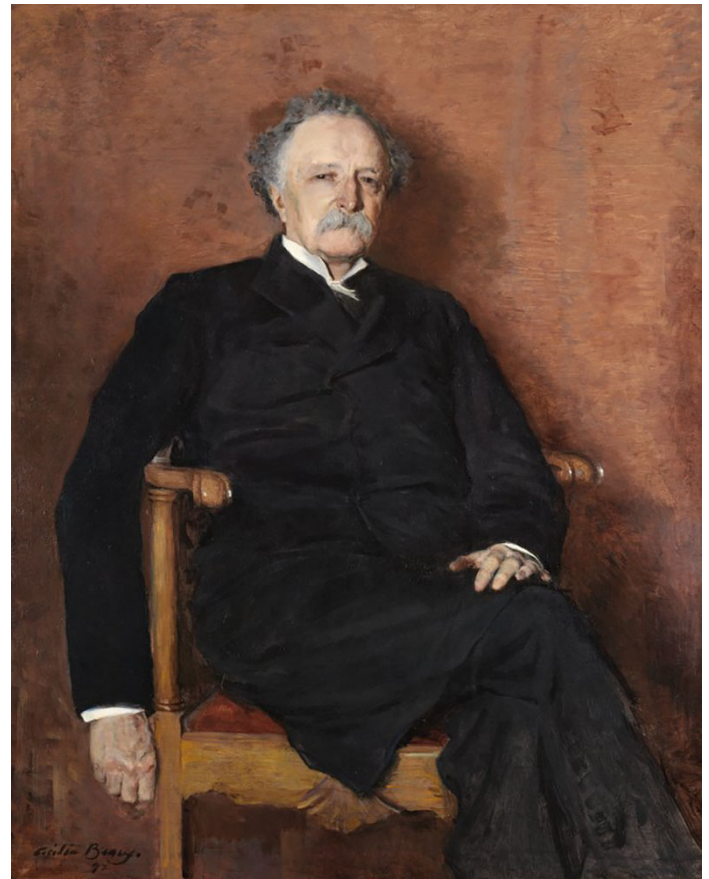


Les Derniers Jours d'Enfance, 1884, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts

She won her first medal from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1884, for her first major work, *Les Derniers Jours d'Enfance*, a full-length portrait of her sister and nephew, a painting which was later accepted in the Paris Salon of 1887. By the mid-1880s she was highly successful in Philadelphia; in a three-year period she painted over forty portraits of prominent Philadelphians. Although her career was well established she decided in 1888 to leave Philadelphia and travel to Paris to continue her training. She remained in France for two years, taking classes at the Academie Julian and studying the old masters at the Louvre. A summer in Brittany, painting alongside young Impressionists, clarified her technique, incorporating elements of their style into her own work. She returned to the United States in late 1889 and resumed her career in Philadelphia. She opened a New York studio on Washington Square in 1899.



Mrs. Lars Anderson, 1901
The Society of the Cincinnati



Rev. Matthew Blackburne Grier, 1892
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

Cecilia Beaux refused many offers of marriage, preferring to devote herself to painting. She exhibited in Paris, London, Philadelphia, New York, and in the Women's Building of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. In 1895 she became the first woman to teach painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, a position she held for twenty years.

Comparisons with her well-known contemporary, John Singer Sargent, were frequent. They shared an ability to flatter their subjects while remaining faithful to realistic interpretation. An often-repeated story has the great Harvard-educated art historian, Bernard Berenson, commenting at an exhibition, "Ah, yes, I see! Some Sargents. The ordinary ones are signed John Sargent, the best are signed Cecilia Beaux."



Ernesta, 1894, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Sita and Sarita, 1921, National Gallery of Art

In her lifetime she was acclaimed as the greatest living “woman painter,” a category she ridiculed in her lectures, saying that it would be flattering only if the category of “man painter” also existed. She received honorary degrees from the University of Pennsylvania in 1908 and from Yale in 1912. In 1924 the Uffizi collection in Florence invited her to contribute a self-portrait, the first American to be so honored.



Self Portrait, Uffizi Gallery, 1924

In 1933, first lady Eleanor Roosevelt presented Beaux with the gold medal of chi omega, the national woman's fraternity, calling her "the American woman who made the greatest contribution to the culture of the world."

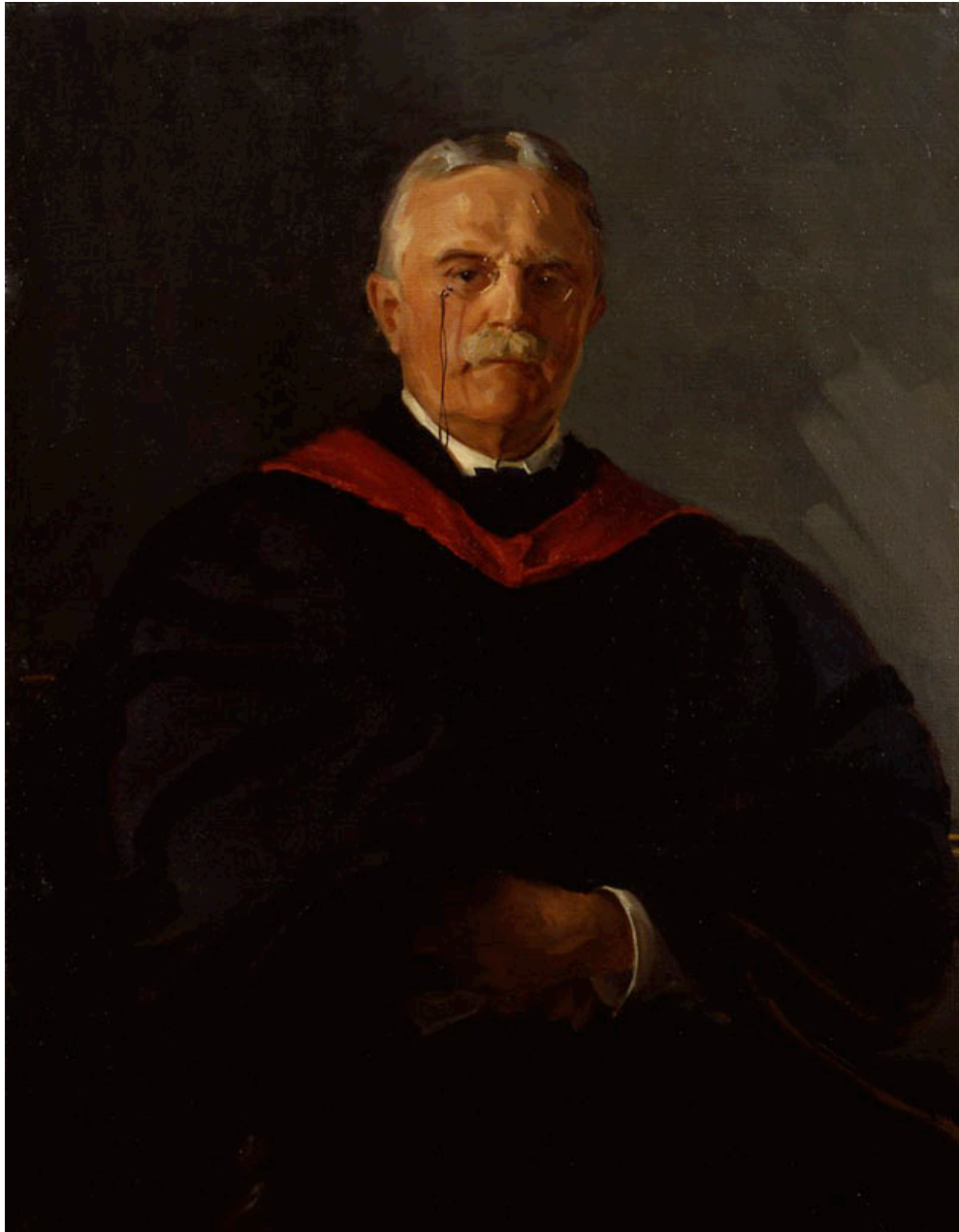
Beaux spent summers in Gloucester, Massachusetts from 1900 on, and designed and built a home for herself called Green Alley in 1905. She moved there permanently in 1906.

The Harvard Club archives hold a scrapbook titled "Contemporary Photographs for the 1903 Bedroom, Harvard Club," which documents in several unpublished snapshots the 1903 outing to Gloucester of a group of undergraduates. In one, Cecilia Beaux appears with the group, she is second from the right.



Cecilia Beaux died at Green Alley in 1942, at the age of 87-- just three months after receiving the gold medal from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, in New York, an honor given to a painter only once a decade.

Her portrait of Charles Fairchild hangs in the Biddle Room on the third floor of the Club. Over the years, the work has been loaned to several exhibitions. In 1906, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts asked to borrow it for their Annual Exhibition, and in a letter to the Art Committee of the Club, there is the statement, "Miss Beaux has suggested that there is no work which would better represent her than the portrait of the Hon. Charles S. Fairchild."



Comments or questions are welcome: msaunders@hcnyc.com

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