

Stratford History - Always Amazing

By David Wright, Editor
Stratford Historical Society's
UPDATE

A Presidential Portrait Painter New Haven Morning Journal and Courier July 12, 1893

Calvin Curtis, who was one of the most widely known American artists of the old school, died this morning at his home here, aged seventy-one years. He was born July 5, 1822, in Stratford, and has resided here entirely, with the exception of a few trips abroad and to various parts of the United States, taken in the interests of art. In early life he showed much talent for art, and when comparatively young painted landscapes and portraits, which received favorable notice from capable critics.

Before reaching his majority he became a pupil of Daniel Huntington, a famous artist of years ago, and later was an associate of all the American artists of the old school. His fame spread throughout the United States, and his works were to some extent known abroad. In early life he devoted his talents almost entirely to landscape painting, and was beyond middle age when he began to paint portraits, which also added to his reputation. When he was fifty-five years of age

he was stricken with paralysis in the lower limbs. For a year he was compelled to give up work, and when he again took up his brush began to paint portraits.

He painted portraits for most of the leading families in this section of the state and the portraits of the judges which hang in the county court house at Bridgeport are his productions. Among the works produced during this period which decide his position as a painter and will live as a lasting memorial of his ability is the portrait of Chief Justice Butler, now in the Fairfield county court house.

This work would have won him recognition as an artist of great power had he never done any other equally excellent work, but his portraits of Judge S. B. Beardley, Amos S. Treat, esq., Lieutenant Governor Averill, the Hon. James C. Loomis, I. M. Sturges, esq., and Colonel S. B. Sumner, hanging in the same building, are of similar character and amply vindicate his artistic ability...

Calvin Curtis is known as the portrait painter for President James Garfield, however, his portrait of Garfield was not used as the "official" portrait because it was considered too dark. Calvin Curtis' sketchbook from 1873-1893 recently came into the collection at the Stratford

Historical Society. You may view many of Calvin's portraits, online, at <http://cc.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info>. In the Judson House the Historical Society has on display Calvin's first painting which was of his aunt. This painting Calvin made at the age of seventeen. Unfortunately, we've been unable to locate a picture of Calvin Curtis himself.



One of Curtis' paintings at the Stratford Historical Society.