



G.P.A. Healy 1813–1894

A 19th century portrait painter, G.P.A. Healy is believed to have painted the portraits of more American presidents than any other artist in history. He moved from Paris to Chicago in 1856 and lived with his family in Elmhurst from 1857 to 1863.

While still in France, Healy was commissioned to paint a portrait of King Louis Philippe. The king was so impressed with Healy's work that he commissioned him to paint portraits of Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and other statesmen. These portraits were hung in the Louvre.

After moving to the U.S., Healy was commissioned by Congress to paint a series of portraits of U.S. presidents which would be hung in the White House.

The Healy family lived in Elmhurst until 1863 when financial decline caused by recessionary times and a drop in commissions forced them to move back to Chicago.

George Peter Alexander Healy, the famous American portrait painter, was born in 1813 in Boston, the eldest son of William Healy, a sea captain, and Mary Hicks Healy. At eighteen he opened a studio in Boston, and the next year exhibited his paintings. In 1834 he set out for Paris to continue his studies, where he was admitted to the studio of Antione-Jean Gros, then at the height of his fame. In Paris, Healy developed a large patronage which included such distinguished subjects as King Louis Philippe, Lewis Cass, Léon Gambetta, and Marshal Soult. In 1855 he received a medal at the Universal Exposition for his "Franklin Urging the Claims of the American Colonists before Louis XVI." Later that year, he returned to the United States and set up his studio on Lake Street in Chicago. Healy went to Rome in 1867, where he was invited to contribute a self-portrait to the collection in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence--the first American to be so honored. Between 1873 and 1892, Healy worked in Paris; here he became aware of a changing outlook on art, and felt out of sympathy with the new tastes. In 1892, he returned to Chicago, where he died in 1894. Among his most important American subjects are a series of the Presidents, as well as "The Peacemakers," a group portrait of the nation's Civil War leaders. Displayed in the Calumet Club, this painting was destroyed in the great fire in 1871; but a number of Healy's studies of individuals from this group are preserved among the paintings he presented in 1887 to the newly-established Newberry Library.

Main Lobby, First

- 1 Philip Henry SHERIDAN (1831-1888), U. S. General. Painted from life about 1867.
- 2 Ulysses Simpson GRANT (1822-1885), U. S. President, 1869-1877. Painted for "The Peacemakers" the last year of the war.
- 3 David Dixon PORTER (1813-1891), U.S. Navy Admiral. A study for "The Peacemakers".
- 4 Daniel WEBSTER (1782-1852), U.S. Senator and Secretary of State. Painted about 1848 in Washington, D.C.

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- 5 William Tecumseh SHERMAN (1820-1891) Commanding General, U.S. Army, 1869-1877, and important in American Indian affairs.

Public Catalogue Room, Second

- 6 Pierre Gustave Toutant de BEAUREGARD (1818-1893), famous Confederate General. Portrait painted in New Orleans in 1864, just before the war. Healy told how he laughed at reports that he, a Yankee, would be tarred and feathered; but his wife warned him that he must leave the city at once. A horse and wagon were ready at midnight, and Healy left the city.
- 7 Franz LISZT (1811-1886), Hungarian virtuoso pianist and composer. Liszt played during the sittings, which Healy recalls prolonging as much as possible.

- 18 Sir Joseph LYONS (1848-1914), businessman and restaurateur.
- 19 CAROL I (1839-1914), King of Rumania. Healy was invited to attend the coronation in 1881.
- 20 Louis Adolphe THIERS (1797-1877), President of France. Painted in 1871. According to Healy, Thiers went to sleep during the session.
- 21 Vicomte Ferdinand MARC (1818-1894), French diplomat. He conceived the canal at Suez. Painted in 1882.
- 22 Jules François SIMON (1798-1876), Minister of Public Instruction, expressly for the New York of Eliphalet W. Blatchford.
- 23 Whitelaw REID (1837-1902), journalist, and editor of the New York Tribune, 1871-1875. Paris, 1890, when Reid visited the United States.
- 24 John McCLOSKEY, D.D., Catholic Bishop, 1844-1888. New York, 1864; and first Bishop of New York, 1875.
- 25 Léon GAMBETTA (1838-1882), man and co-founder of the Third Republic.
- 26 James G. BLAINE (1830-1883), Secretary of State, and presidential candidate. Painted from life in Washington, 1877.