

Bust of Albert J. Jones

Unknown artist, *Bust of Albert J. Jones* (unknown date). Bronze, H.26 in. (66 cm.). Donated by Mrs. Emily A. Hall in 1898.

The bold and quite unique bronze bust of Providence art critic and benefactor, Albert J. Jones (1821-1887) stands out from the marble and plaster busts that can be found throughout the Athenaeum. His Victorian mustache and hair contrast the naked torso and material of which the bust. Bronze busts were commonplace in Ancient Greece but fell out of style in favor of Marble and Plaster in the Roman era. While his head is created in what would have been a contemporary style, his lack of clothing is a direct nod to a more Classical style of portrait sculpture.

Albert J. Jones served as the Providence Athenaeum's Secretary for several years in the 1840's after which he went on to become a renowned art critic, writing for the *New York Times* and building a quite significant independent portfolio. Jones moved to Rome after his tenure at the Athenaeum to study and write about American sculptors working in Italy in the 1860s and 1870s.[1] In 1860, Jones acquired one work in particular that holds a great amount of significance to the Athenaeum, which is the panoramic photograph of the Coliseum by Tommaso Cuccioni [Italian, 1790-1864], an important early photographer working in Rome. The five-foot wide photograph from c.1859 was taken when photography was a new media and the size of the panorama makes it historically and technologically significant. When the photograph arrived at the Athenaeum it was quite popular because of the novelty of the medium and its rarity.

Jones left quite a legacy in Providence as a patron of the arts and more specifically, literature. Jones' most important contribution to Providence is the Jones Library Fund, which he established in 1891. The fund was established for the acquisition of literature that illustrated the art of design, as applied to decorative or industrial arts. The works acquired through this fund are now found at the Brown Library. [2]

The artist who created this bronze portrait bust is unknown, as is the date of its creation. His sister, Mrs. Emily A. Hall, donated the bust of her brother and the bust was said to be "a striking likeness of a donor to [the Athenaeum]." [3]

[1] Austin, Nancy (2015) "The Half-Life & After-Life of New Media," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 2, Article 3. P. 5

[2] Jane Lancaster, *Inquire Within: A Social History of the Providence Athenaeum since 1753* (Providence: The Providence Athenaeum, 2003), 125

[3] *Sixty-Third Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Providence Athenaeum to the Corporation*, submitted September 26, 1898, 8