

PROVIDENCE ATHENAEUM –Wheaton College student essay, 2016.

James Sullivan Lincoln, *John Russell Bartlett as an Old Man* (ca. 1870-1886). Oil on Canvas, 16 7/8" x 13 7/8". Elisha Capron Mowry, 1964.

This portrait, also of the famed Rhode Island, Bartlett serves as a compliment to the painting *John Russell Bartlett as a Young Man*. Each serves to show Athenaeum viewers a different episode in the great man's life.

If John Russell Bartlett [1805-1886] were known to us only as a young man, our image of his him would be missing the many important accomplishments and contributions of his later life. Bartlett moved around continually through his life -- he traveled to Mexico and abroad to Europe, and spent long periods in New York City and Canada, but he always returned to his beloved Providence--and continued to bring benefits to the city. Between 1855 to 1872 Bartlett became the Secretary of State of Rhode Island, a position in which he was enormously popular; indeed, in one election as Bartlett recalled, "...when more votes were polled than ever before in the state, I received every vote. I think about 25,000 votes were polled."¹ During his time as Secretary of State Bartlett accomplished a great deal including, starting the collection of portraits of Rhode Island Governors and organizing and printing of state records.² It was when he held this position that the second portrait *John Bartlett as an Old Man* was painted. Bartlett seems to have commissioned the portrait himself, as it is noted that he paid the artist \$75.³

Whereas the authorship of *Bartlett as a Young Man* is still in question, the artist of this painting is well known. James Sullivan Lincoln [American,1811-1888], a Providence artist, painted the portrait between 1870-1886. It has written about Lincoln that, "For years he stood at the head of his profession in Rhode Island, and indeed he has been termed 'the father of art in this state'"⁴. Lincoln was also an important member of the Providence art community in another fashion, serving as the first president of the Providence Art Club. This portrait is particularly significant to the Athenaeum because it represents someone, and was created by one who was so influential to both the Athenaeum and Providence, in great esteem by the city and the art community within it.

Pictured some 50 years older than in his earlier image, Bartlett still projects the same determined expression -- a clear sign of the accomplishments he had achieved and the career he would continue to foster. A long grey beard softens the stern expression and his

¹ John Russell Bartlett, and Jerry E. Mueller. *Autobiography of John Russell Bartlett, 1805-1886*. Providence, RI: John Carter Brown Library, 2006. 43

² John Russell Bartlett Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Accessed March 23, 2016, www.rihs.org/mssinv

³ John Russell Bartlett, and Jerry E. Mueller. *Autobiography of John Russell Bartlett, 1805-1886*. Providence, RI: John Carter Brown Library, 2006. 43

⁴ Collins, Clarkson A and Monahan, Clifford P., *Portraits by James S. Lincoln, 1837-1887*

hair – no longer fashionably unkempt -- soberly frames his face. Much like the portrait of *Bartlett as a Young Man*, this portrait of the older Bartlett features contemporary clothes in somber colors. The portrait suits the image of a man held in such high regard.

This portrait was kept within the Bartlett family until it was given to the Athenaeum, with one exception. After James Sullivan Lincoln died in 1888, a retrospective exhibition of his works was put on at the Providence Art Club to honor his memory. Within the list of works shown was this portrait of Bartlett, loaned to the show his widow, Eliza Allen (Rhodes) Bartlett.”⁵. This work, along with the likeness of Bartlett as a young man, were donated in 1964 by Elisha Capron Mowry (1882-1978). Mowry’s wife, Ida Russell Mowry, was of the Bartlett family⁶. Together, they bookend a remarkable life spent in the service of the library that now acts as their steward.

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⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Elisha Capron Mowry, *Geni*, Accessed March 23,2016, www.geni.com/people/Elisha-Mowry