The William Trego painting of General Custer, which used to hang above the microfilm machines in the Illinois Collection, sold at auction last week for $11,500.

William B. T. Trego was born in Pennsylvania in 1858. At the age of two William's hands and feet became nearly paralyzed, either from polio or from a doctor administering a dose of calomel (mercurous chloride). Despite his crippled hands, young William showed an aptitude for art, learning to paint with a brush jammed in his right hand while he guided it with his left.

This painting was donated to the library by Adlai Ewing (uncle of Spencer Ewing). We do not know when the donation was made.

* Adlai Ewing lived from 1846-1920.
* Spencer Ewing was a library trustee for 35+ years. He resigned from the board due to ill health in 1949 and died in 1952.

(Yes. These folks are related to the Adlai Ewing Stevenson family. I’m not sure how.)

In researching the provenance of the painting, we located a webpage devoted to Trego’s work. That page is part of the James A Michener Art Museum’s website -- [bit.ly/tregocatalog](https://bit.ly/tregocatalog). Because our painting wasn’t listed in this Trego catalog, we reached out to the museum and received a reply from Joseph Eckhardt. He said that he and the museum had been looking for this painting for years. He believes its actual title to be *The Charge of Custer at Winchester*, 1879.

* + We called this painting *General Custer* when we gave it to Hindman Auctions.
  + Hindman Auctions listed it as *General Custer Leading the Charge.*
  + A 1979 article in *The Pantagraph* referred to the painting as *“an oil by William Thomas Trego, possibly titled, ‘Into the Fight.’ “*

BPL did not initially believe the two paintings to be one and the same because the size listed on the museum’s website was smaller than BPL’s painting. Eckhardt informed us that the size listed on the museum’s website was a guess because they did not have the painting available for measuring.

**FROM THE MUSEUM WEBSITE**

COMMENTARY

This now-vanished painting won an award at the Michigan State Fair in Detroit in 1879. It was the work that launched Trego’s career and made him an overnight sensation at age twenty. The City of Detroit was so stunned by the work that an attempt was made to purchase it for permanent display in some local venue. While this attempt failed, an American diplomat, John C. White, Secretary to the American Legation in Brazil, ultimately purchased the painting for one thousand dollars in 1884. What became of the painting beyond White’s purchase is unknown.

EXHIBITIONS

Michigan State Fair in August/September 1879 (*Detroit Free Press,* 23 August 1879. Detroit, September 1879: Angell’s Art Gallery (*Detroit Free Press,* 23 Aug 1879)

**ABOUT JOSEPH P. ECKHARDT**

When Professor Joseph P. Eckhardt retired from teaching History and Art History in 2007, he began to research the life of American artist William T. Trego. In 2011, he curated a major retrospective exhibition of Trego’s work at the James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown, PA. He also published a biography of Trego (*So Bravely and So Well*) and put together a catalogue of Trego’s work (which remains available online). In speaking with Eckhardt, I was told “*I am glad to see it is in good condition … It was sold by Trego in 1884, but beyond that I was never able to track down its owner … The museum, after looking for it for years, considered the work lost, but there it was sitting in your library!*”

**BPL RESEARCH ALSO REVEALED:**

* Correspondence from 1950 indicates that staff at Bloomington Library were trying to learn more about the Trego painting, without much success.
* Correspondence from 1967-68 indicates that the library loaned the painting to a Custer exhibit at the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art in Fort Worth, TX. The exhibit was titled *CUSTER’S LAST or The Battle of the Little Big Horn in Picturesque Perspective.* The exhibit appears to have opened on Thursday, January 25, 1968.

**ADLAI STEVENSON CONNECTION**

* Adlai Ewing is somehow related to the Adlai Ewing Stevenson family.
  + [Adlai Ewing Stevenson I](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FAdlai_Stevenson_I&data=05%7C01%7Cbriarkoehl%40hindmanauctions.com%7C95bc2ff6d21b4f41655d08db29bc3765%7C5db5b6d911b04ad795dba54a1de3a9b8%7C0%7C0%7C638149660598595805%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=OtuLDhKpPfvVmHuIv%2BpCeOOlYHq5hEv4ftvsu%2Fd6HS4%3D&reserved=0), 23rd [vice president of the United States](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FVice_president_of_the_United_States&data=05%7C01%7Cbriarkoehl%40hindmanauctions.com%7C95bc2ff6d21b4f41655d08db29bc3765%7C5db5b6d911b04ad795dba54a1de3a9b8%7C0%7C0%7C638149660598595805%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=m4squaAx%2FE9sRKzij2js6SFvEr0WDVk7v%2Bmijbv6G%2Fg%3D&reserved=0) under Grover Cleveland. In 1852, his father set free their few slaves and the family moved to [Bloomington, Illinois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloomington,_Illinois), where his father then operated a sawmill. Stevenson attended [Illinois Wesleyan University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illinois_Wesleyan_University) at Bloomington and ultimately graduated from [Centre College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centre_College), in [Danville, Kentucky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danville,_Kentucky); at the latter he was a part of [Phi Delta Theta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phi_Delta_Theta).[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adlai_Stevenson_I#cite_note-4) His father's death prompted Stevenson to return from Kentucky to Illinois to run the sawmill. Stevenson [studied law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reading_law) with Bloomington attorney Robert E. Williams. He was [admitted to the bar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Admission_to_the_bar_in_the_United_States) in 1858, and commenced practice in [Metamora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metamora,_Illinois). As a young lawyer, Stevenson encountered such celebrated Illinois attorneys as [Stephen A. Douglas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_A._Douglas) and [Abraham Lincoln](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln), and he campaigned for Douglas in his 1858 Senate race against Lincoln. Stevenson's dislike of Lincoln might have been prompted by a contentious meeting between the two, at which Lincoln made several witty quips disparaging Stevenson.
  + Adlai Ewing Stevenson II – Adlai Stevenson I’s grandson; (February 5, 1900 – July 14, 1965) was an American politician and diplomat who was the [United States Ambassador to the United Nations](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FUnited_States_Ambassador_to_the_United_Nations&data=05%7C01%7Cbriarkoehl%40hindmanauctions.com%7C95bc2ff6d21b4f41655d08db29bc3765%7C5db5b6d911b04ad795dba54a1de3a9b8%7C0%7C0%7C638149660598438620%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=yTELmI3POLUONIkgXMw9R05iJoIvJKCwzUl700T1fk8%3D&reserved=0) from 1961 until his death in 1965. He previously served as the 31st [governor of Illinois](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FGovernor_of_Illinois&data=05%7C01%7Cbriarkoehl%40hindmanauctions.com%7C95bc2ff6d21b4f41655d08db29bc3765%7C5db5b6d911b04ad795dba54a1de3a9b8%7C0%7C0%7C638149660598438620%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=5SBs7K5DiTdM79%2FSIf5U7ncuJq4KN7CcTsySP7JHoVE%3D&reserved=0) from 1949 to 1953 and was the [Democratic](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FDemocratic_Party_(United_States)&data=05%7C01%7Cbriarkoehl%40hindmanauctions.com%7C95bc2ff6d21b4f41655d08db29bc3765%7C5db5b6d911b04ad795dba54a1de3a9b8%7C0%7C0%7C638149660598438620%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=DxXK0O5lQSufkJHl9aoHRZUcyJiP4vFNKaUskLVPIS8%3D&reserved=0) nominee for [President of the United States](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FPresident_of_the_United_States&data=05%7C01%7Cbriarkoehl%40hindmanauctions.com%7C95bc2ff6d21b4f41655d08db29bc3765%7C5db5b6d911b04ad795dba54a1de3a9b8%7C0%7C0%7C638149660598438620%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=RPlNgFc%2BeNsORUtVftv8b%2BvG25YLDADe0nxkqgqjU6E%3D&reserved=0) in [1952](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2F1952_United_States_presidential_election&data=05%7C01%7Cbriarkoehl%40hindmanauctions.com%7C95bc2ff6d21b4f41655d08db29bc3765%7C5db5b6d911b04ad795dba54a1de3a9b8%7C0%7C0%7C638149660598438620%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=qq79EH2DGsTDi7DOQeLWdkrxftUB%2FiQvDugTIy2kSKw%3D&reserved=0) and [1956](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2F1956_United_States_presidential_election&data=05%7C01%7Cbriarkoehl%40hindmanauctions.com%7C95bc2ff6d21b4f41655d08db29bc3765%7C5db5b6d911b04ad795dba54a1de3a9b8%7C0%7C0%7C638149660598438620%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=YuFb%2F0XJNwS3Pja7kl7A0DOmxSsd6596IBVqYQZYAgA%3D&reserved=0), losing both elections to [Dwight Eisenhower](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FDwight_D._Eisenhower&data=05%7C01%7Cbriarkoehl%40hindmanauctions.com%7C95bc2ff6d21b4f41655d08db29bc3765%7C5db5b6d911b04ad795dba54a1de3a9b8%7C0%7C0%7C638149660598438620%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=8GqJepfHrFYOxv3g%2Fb0EFA8aTl73gl7ALt1t0mPFDLo%3D&reserved=0).