

Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce

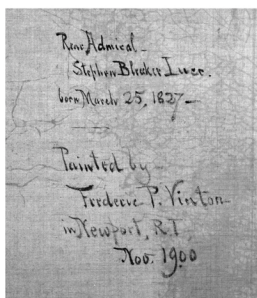
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Oil on Canvas

Frederic P. Vinton, 1900

Donation to the Naval War College by subscription

Ac. 1976.29.01



Inscription on the back of the painting.

On the back of the canvas, the artist recorded Luce's name and birth year, as well as the date and place the portrait was painted.

The College's founder and first president, Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce (1827–1917), is recognized by historians as the “Intellectual Leader of the ‘New Steel Navy’” that developed at the end of the nineteenth century. In that period, the U.S. Navy went through a major transformation, not only from small to major-power status, but also from wood to steel, and sail to steam. These changes brought with them an intellectual as well as a technological revolution. In the midst of this transformation, it was Stephen B. Luce who was the most important figure in teaching American naval officers to think broadly about their profession and to understand the fundamental nature of naval power, noting both its capabilities and its limitations.

Luce had become the Navy's most capable seaman and then went on to become its great educator. In 1883, he was instrumental in the Navy's acquisition of Coasters Harbor Island in Narragansett Bay for the U.S. Navy's first recruit training command. The first president and driving force behind the Naval War College, he defined it as the highest level of professional naval education and “a place of original research on all questions relating to war and to statesmanship connected with war, or the prevention of war.” After his retirement, he returned as a member of the College's faculty from 1900 to 1910.

The artist, Frederic Porter Vinton (1846–1911), was one of America's foremost portrait painters. Encouraged by William Morris Hunt, he had studied in France and Germany and came to prefer the French portrait style, using neutral backgrounds with dark, vigorous brushwork. Many critics admired his portraits for their elegance and vitality as well as for his careful representation of an individual's features.