



## Historic Art in Boston Hotels

by Frances J. Folsom



Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and Institute of Contemporary Art are among the city's famous repositories of art. Unbeknownst to many visitors and residents is that several of the city's hotels also boast exceptional works by noted artists.

**The Marriott Long Wharf Hotel** overlooking Boston Harbor is the perfect setting for Rufus Porter's (1792–1884) mural *A View of Boston Harbor*. Measuring 15 feet wide by 7 feet high, it takes up an entire wall of the lobby. Porter's simple composition and use of strong shadows capture the harbor's essence at sunset. His color choice of gold, green, brown, and splashes of burnt red is subtle but powerful.

Born in West Boxford, Massachusetts, Rufus Porter painted portraits, signs, and decorated many New England homes with his folk art landscapes of well-known locations. Later he turned to inventing, taking out patents for such things as a corn sheller, a floating dock, and a revolving rifle, the design for which he sold to Samuel Colt. He also founded the journal *Scientific American*.

Porter painted *A View of Boston Harbor* in 1824 on a wall of the Prescott Tavern in Jaffrey, New Hampshire. When the tavern was demolished the mural was purchased by A. Erland Goyette, who had the wall removed to his museum in Peterboro, New Hampshire. When the museum closed in 1960, the mural languished in obscurity for many years until it was purchased and restored by the Marriott Corporation.

The Julien Bar in the **Langham Hotel Boston** is home to two fabulous N. C. Wyeth (1882–1945) murals. Built in 1922 as

### THIS PAGE, TOP:

Zuber wallpaper in the lobby of the Gryphon House, circa 1895. Photography courtesy Stillman Rogers Photography, ©2004.

### THIS PAGE, BOTTOM:

N. C. Wyeth (1882–1945), *Washington* mural, 1922. Courtesy of the Langham Hotel Boston.

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Rufus Porter's (1792–1884), mural *A View of Boston Harbor*, 1824. Upper lobby of the Marriott Long Wharf, Boston. Courtesy of the Marriott Corporation.

the Federal Reserve Bank, the bar was originally the reception room for the bank's board of directors. Wyeth's subjects, Abraham Lincoln and his Secretary of the Treasury at the outbreak of the Civil War, Salmon P. Chase, in one mural; George Washington, Robert Morris (chief financier of the Revolutionary War), and Alexander Hamilton (Secretary of the Treasury), in the other, were patriotic choices and also apt representatives of finance and banking.

Newell Convers Wyeth was born in Needham, Massachusetts. Primarily a book illustrator, Wyeth received the commission for the bank murals from Roger Scaife, his editor at Houghton Mifflin, a friend of the building's architect R. Clipston Sturgess. Wyeth's ability to convey a



Washington diorama, 1975. Courtesy of The Sheraton Commander Hotel.

moment is portrayed in the wrinkled rug under Hamilton's feet. In both murals he expertly captures on his subject's faces the gravity of the situations they are deciding: Washington, Morris, and Hamilton, the financing of the Revolutionary War; Lincoln and Chase, finding the financial resources for the Civil War.

When the **Gryphon House Inn** was built in 1895 the foyer was decorated with the French scenic wallpaper that still hangs there today. The

"*El Dorado*" pattern, consisting of two sets of twenty-four panels, required 1,554 woodblocks and 201 colors to complete. The pattern shows lush tropical plants and birds, as well as temples, rivers, waterfalls, and fountains, describing the kind of place the mythical El Dorado was believed to be.

Made by Zuber Et Cie in Rixheim, France, the company was founded in

1797 and is still producing wallpaper using eighteenth-century techniques. When the Gryphon House wallpaper was shipped from France, Zuber sent representatives to assemble and hang the paper; they used muslin backing for easy removal so that if the owners sold the house they could take the wallpaper with them.

**The Sheraton Commander Hotel** in Cambridge, just across the Charles River from Boston, was built in 1927 by John Shine. The hotel is situated near Cambridge Common, where Washington took command of the Continental Army on July 3, 1775. Drawing inspiration from the area's history, Shine designed the façade to resemble Washington's Mount Vernon and named it The Commander in honor of the war hero.

Among the Washington memorabilia in the hotel's lobby is a unique diorama depicting General Washington addressing the troops. Crafted by military artist Henri E. Lion and members of the Military Collectors of New England in 1975 as part of an exhibit for Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, the diorama commemorates our bicentennial. It contains sixty-five figures, each measuring 2½ inches, displayed in their full uniforms, with tiny muskets, back packs and bed rolls. The general is on horseback, resplendent in his military regalia, with his hat off saluting his men. The attention to detail is striking, with dirt stains on soldier's clothing and the worn centers of the drummer boys' drums. @

*Frances J. Folsom is a freelance writer based in Cambridge, MA.*

## if you go

### Marriott Long Wharf Hotel

296 State Street  
Boston, MA 02109  
Tel: 617.227.0800 or  
1.888.236.2427, or visit  
[www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)

### Langham Hotel Boston

250 Franklin Street  
Boston, MA 02110  
Tel: 617.451.1900 or  
800.791.7781, or visit  
[www.langhamhotels.com](http://www.langhamhotels.com)

### The Gryphon House

9 Bay State Road  
Boston, MA 02215  
Tel: 617.375.9003 or  
877.375.9003, or visit [www.inn-boston.com](http://www.inn-boston.com)

### Sheraton Commander Hotel

16 Garden Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
Tel: 617.547.4800 or  
1.888.627.7121, or visit  
[www.sheraton-commander.com](http://www.sheraton-commander.com)