



Behold the Statue of Freedom

Sculptor Thomas Crawford & Senator Charles Sumner

by Katya Miller

SENATOR CHARLES SCHUMER (D-NY) opened his remarks at the second inauguration of President Barack Obama on February 12, 2013, by pointing to the Statue of Freedom at the top of the dome of the United States Capitol and asking us to “Behold the Statue of Freedom.” He reminded us that there is still work to be done to establish the freedom for all symbolized by the statue when it was erected in 1863, the same year that President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. What Senator Schumer did not mention was the name of Thomas Crawford (fig. 1), the sculptor of the statue, and the story of his remarkable friendship with Charles Sumner (fig. 2), a leading senatorial supporter of emancipation.

The Statue of Freedom was the last commission Crawford completed in his tragically short life; he died of a brain tumor on October 10, 1857, at the age of 43. He was born in New York City and displayed a gift for drawing at an early age. Encouraged by his older sister, Jenny, he scoured the city for prints to study. He read extensively in the history of the architecture and art of ancient Greece and Rome.

At 19, Crawford apprenticed with the New York studio of Frazee and Launitz, where he learned wood and marble carving, while studying at night at the New York National Academy of Design. His employers suggested that he study in Rome with master sculptors. So off he went in May 1835, at the age of 21, with a letter of introduction to the renowned Danish sculptor, Bertel Thorvaldsen, who shared his studio space with the young American and introduced him to the art of carving the Tuscan marble from Carrara, Italy, favored by Michelangelo.¹ While living and studying in Rome, Crawford absorbed the classical forms of high European art and with contemporary sculptors Horatio Greenough and Hiram Powers participated in creating a genre

portraying American themes through neoclassical Italian forms.²

An acquaintance, George Washington Greene, the American consul to Italy, introduced Crawford to Charles Sumner of Boston. Greene had become Crawford’s good friend in 1838 when he took the sculptor, who was ill with “brain fever,” into his home for a month.³ Throughout his illness, brought on by poverty and overwork, Crawford diligently modeled a bust of Greene that Sumner admired and thought an excellent likeness (fig. 3). The sculptor introduced Sumner, a lawyer and a student of the classics, languages, music, and art, to Roman art, culture, and to Crawford’s fellow artists. The two young men became fast and life-long friends. They were only three years apart in age, tall and lanky with congenial temperaments. This friendship helped Crawford secure many of his first commissions.

While Crawford worked “with narrow means and serious misgivings as to the future,” Sumner, along with Greene, made it a point to encourage the sculptor’s ambitions. They directed English and American travelers to visit Crawford’s studio. “Crawford!” Sumner told him, “When I come again to Rome, you will be a great and successful sculptor, and be living in a palace.”⁴ Grateful for the new friendship and Sumner’s promotions on his behalf, Crawford sculpted a marble bust of the Bostonian (fig. 4). Sumner arranged for the Boston Athenaeum to purchase Crawford’s *Orpheus and Cerberus*, a statue of the mythical Greek musician holding a lyre with a three-headed hellhound by his side (fig. 5). Greene had lent Crawford the money to buy the marble and complete the statue.

Orpheus and Cerberus arrived in Boston in 1843 and was exhibited along with the bust of Sumner at the Athenaeum. Although the sculpture arrived with some of its parts broken off during the voyage, Sumner later wrote, “The ‘Orpheus’ is on its pedestal . . . and makes music with its beauty. It is thoroughly restored so



Fig. 1. This portrait of Thomas Crawford by Allyn Cox is in the Hall of Capitols mural in the ground floor of the House wing of the United States Capitol. ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL

the stranger, who knew nothing of the accident during its shipping, might not dream that it was not fresh and whole from the artist's chisel. It is an exquisite work of art."⁵ Crawford's first show in the United States established his reputation and led to

other commissions to sculpt mythological and religious figures. Unfortunately, because he was still a starving artist in Rome, he was unable to attend the opening of this first exhibit.⁶

Earlier in 1841, Charles Sumner visited his brother in New York City and met three intriguing young women: Julia, Louisa, and Annie Ward. The three daughters of Samuel Ward and Julia Rush Cutler were considered exceptionally beautiful and were known as "The Three Graces of Bond Street."⁷ Their home school education, liberal for the day, included ancient and modern languages. After their mother's early death, the young girls were raised by their strict Calvinist father, yet were free to pursue their particular personal interests and individual styles.

On April 23, 1843, Sumner stood by his close friend Dr. Samuel Howe (physician, abolitionist, and educational reformer) when Howe married Julia Ward, who later gained fame as the author of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and the "Mother's Day Proclamation." Through his friendship with Sumner and Greene, Crawford met all three sisters. Annie traveled with the newlyweds on their honeymoon voyage to Europe. Middle sister Louisa Ward set sail for Rome in December 1843, accompanied by her father's cousin, George Washington Greene, Crawford's old friend and patron who was now the American ambassador to Italy. Crawford's studio was the family's first point of interest in Rome. They immediately became part of Crawford's social circle and attended many of the same cultural gatherings and salons where he had the opportunity to meet, court, and fall in love with Louisa. Later that year, Crawford returned to New York City to pursue his courtship. In November 1844, Crawford married the New York heiress, much to the chagrin of her uncle and guardian, John Ward.⁸ Crawford did not have the wealthy background or the education that Ward envisioned for the husbands of his nieces.

In Rome, the following year, Crawford carved a graceful marble bust of Louisa that was the expression of his undying love for his



Fig. 2. Senator Charles Sumner, photograph by Julian Vannerson, published in *McClees' Gallery of Photographic Portraits of the Senators, Representatives and Delegates of the Thirty-Fifth Congress* (Washington, D.C., 1859).

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new bride (fig. 6). The bust looked as though it was made of delicate porcelain and was carved with exquisite flowers gracing her flowing veil.

Crawford gave it as a kind of peace offering to her uncle John. The gift helped the sculptor gain greater recognition when the remarkable bust was exhibited in New York at the American Art-Union in 1849 and at the New York Crystal Palace exhibition in 1853.⁹

Thomas and Louisa returned to the United States in 1849 when a Boston paper announced the competition for a monument in Richmond, Virginia to honor George Washington. With the deadline fast approaching, Crawford modeled an equestrian Washington and sent it off to Virginia. The Virginia commissioners also wanted to honor six of their most prominent statesmen with statues around the base of the monument.¹⁰ Knowing that he had competition, Crawford made a special trip to Richmond to further his case. His efforts paid off and he was awarded the commission.¹¹

The monument includes a realistic, historical figure of Washington mounted on his horse,¹² six full-length statues, shields, and thirteen wreaths and stars (fig. 7). Crawford worked mainly in marble, but realized bronze was the best material for outdoor sculpture.¹³ Work for his first bronze casting began in 1850 and was completed by February 22, 1856.¹⁴ Before his death in 1857, Crawford completed only the equestrian Washington and the figures of Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson and the plaster casts of John Marshall and George Mason; sculptor Randolph Rogers oversaw the casting of Marshall and Mason and supplied his own statues of Thomas Nelson and Andrew Lewis.¹⁵

American sculptors were needed as the Capitol building progressed in the 1850s. Captain Montgomery Meigs, the engineer and officer in charge of Capitol commissions, requested the names of potential sculptors from Sen. Edward Everett (MA), a former

president of Harvard, governor of Massachusetts, and secretary of state.¹⁶ Everett recommended Horatio Greenough, but he had lost interest in Capitol commissions after the unhappy reception of his semi-nude classical statue of George Washington.¹⁷

Crawford, on the other hand, welcomed the opportunity to sculpt statuary for the United States Capitol in a realistic American manner. In August 1853, Meigs wrote to Crawford about a sculptural pediment and bronze doors for the east front of the new Senate wing, “I do not see why a Republic so much richer than the Athenian should not rival the Parthenon in the front of its first public edifice.”¹⁸ Crawford responded at the end of October with a compelling design for the pediment as well as the bronze doors for the eastern entrances to the House and Senate wings (figs. 8 a, b, and c).¹⁹ Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, in charge of construction of the Capitol Extension between 1853 and 1857, approved the details and secured the appropriation of money for Crawford’s work. The sculptor’s reputation, his easy and respectful relationship with patrons, and the realism of his American sculptural designs created a successful relationship with Meigs and Davis. While he concentrated on the artistic work for the Capitol, the nation was in turmoil over the slavery issue. Many of his and Louisa’s relatives were ardent abolitionists, and many of his friends, including Charles Sumner, were calling for an end to slavery. Crawford’s work went on, though he was not unaware of the politics surrounding him.

Crawford completed the full-size models for the Senate pediment group that he entitled *Progress of Civilization* in the spring of 1854 (fig. 8a). As a reflection of the era of Manifest Destiny, it illustrated the establishment of European culture on the North American continent.²⁰ At the center, a female figure symbolizes America; she is flanked by European pioneers and ‘vanquished’ American Indians. The pediment was controversial. Debaters in the House and the Senate argued that the Capitol did not need more art.²¹ It seemed as though everyone, newspaper editors and congressmen alike, was an art critic. The completed pediment was installed in 1863.

Crawford’s final commission in 1855 was an enormous statue representing the spirit of America to stand on the pinnacle of the Capitol dome. Between May 1855 and January 1856, Crawford sent Meigs and Davis three designs of carved models; the first two were rejected. One had a liberty cap. Jefferson Davis, a slave owner,

adamantly disapproved of the cap, stating “Americans were born free”²² and thus the Capitol should not bear any of the symbols of slavery. Crawford’s third and final representation changed from an Athenian figure to a very American figure.

As William C. Allen notes in the *History of the United States Capitol*, Davis wrote to Meigs, who guided Crawford in his designs, that “Why should not Armed Liberty wear a helmet.”²³ Meigs notified Crawford of Davis’s comments.

Crawford sent a photograph of his third design with a letter that explained what he had done and why. He dispensed with the cap per Davis’s wishes, and replaced it with a helmet the crest of which is composed of “an eagle’s head and a bold arrangement of feathers suggested by the costume of our Indian tribes.”²⁴ (As a West Point cadet, Jefferson Davis had drawn Minerva with a helmet.) The eagle, a symbol of freedom, appears on the Great Seal of the United States. A medallion carved with the initials U.S., similar to the medallions gifted to the Native American tribes by American presidents in the nineteenth century, holds together her inner drapery. Crawford himself stated that he placed it such that “the drapery is so arranged as to indicate rays of light proceeding from the letters.”²⁵ A sheathed sword rests in her right hand and

Fig. 3. *George Washington Greene*, by Thomas Crawford, plaster, 1841.

LONGFELLOW NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



Fig. 4. *Charles Sumner*, by Thomas Crawford, ca. 1837-39, marble.

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Fig. 5. *Orpheus and Cerberus*, by Thomas Crawford, 1843, marble.

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON



Fig. 6. *Louisa Ward Crawford*, by Thomas Crawford, 1846, marble (the bust is also known as Louisa Ward Terry, the name she took after marrying artist Luther Terry following Crawford's death).

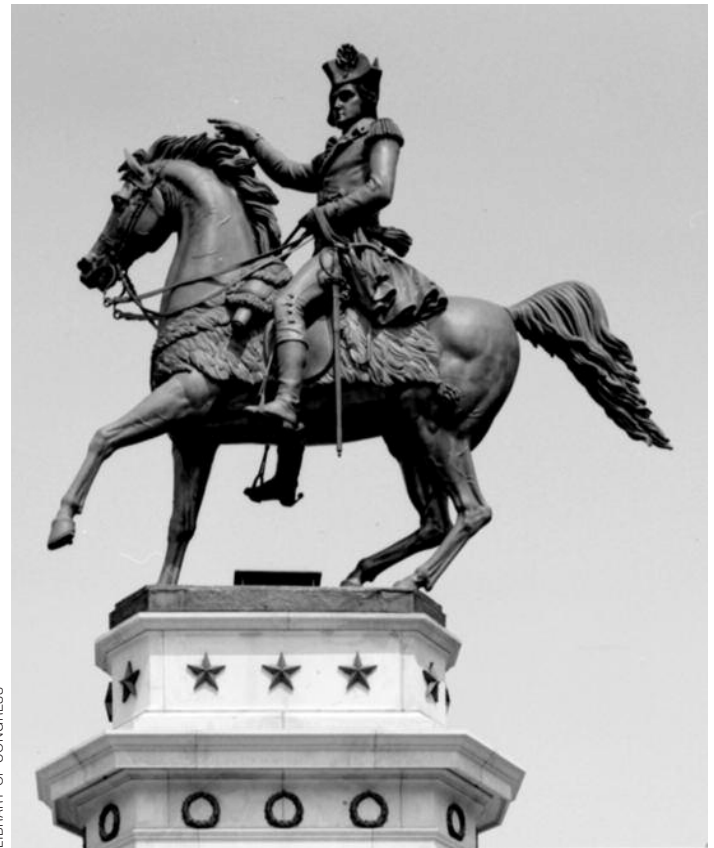
MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Fig. 7. *George Washington Equestrian Monument* in Richmond, Virginia, by Thomas Crawford, 1854, bronze.

she holds a shield with a laurel wreath in her left. The talons of the eagle, also a Roman symbol of empire, hang down the sides of her helmet. He thought this was “more *American*.”²⁶

Meanwhile, Sumner was involved passionately in the abolition and pacifist movements at home. Now a senator from Massachusetts, he delivered his famous “Crime against Kansas” speech in 1856 during the debate to admit Kansas to the Union as a free or slave state. Sumner’s oratory had long been praised. Henry Wordsworth Longfellow (fig. 9) wrote that he delivered speeches “like a cannoneer ramming down cartridges” The speech he delivered that day is one of the most important documents of the pacifist movement. His earlier speech “The Grandeur of Nations” called for peace, justice, and humanity and denounced building a military that cost more than the commerce of the nation the military was to protect.

At the time he delivered the Crime against Kansas speech, Sumner was in his prime as an orator and by all accounts offended many. Representative Preston Brooks of South Carolina took



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Fig. 8A. Progress of Civilization, by Thomas Crawford, marble, placed 1863, pediment over the east entrance to the Senate wing of the United States Capitol.

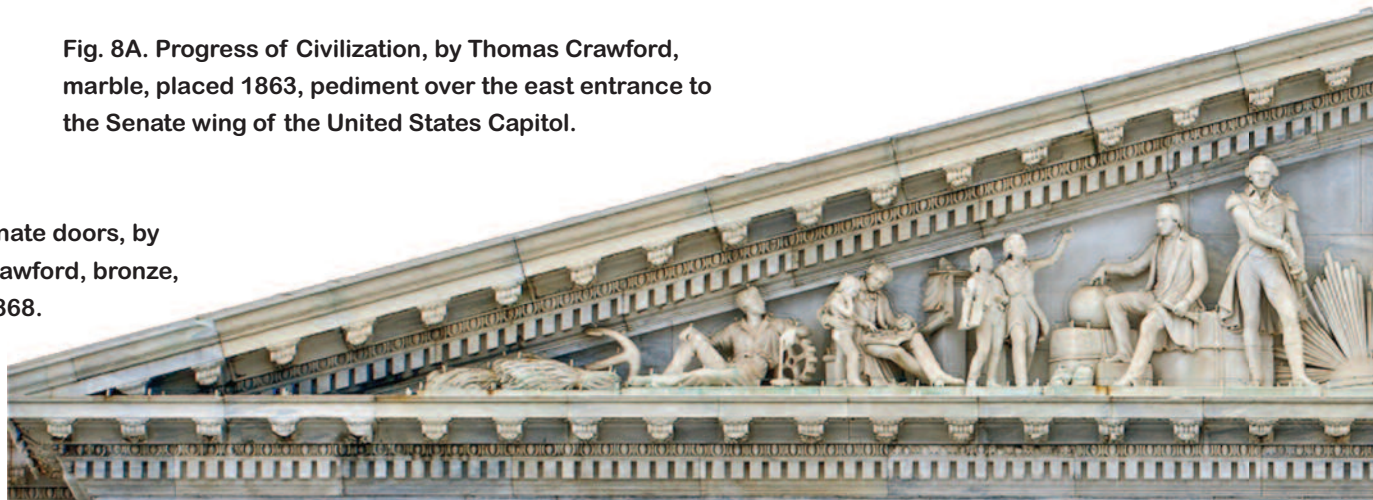


Fig. 8B. Senate doors, by Thomas Crawford, bronze, installed 1868.



offense at the personal insult in the speech to his kinsman Sen. Andrew Butler, and a day later beat Sumner over the head with his “unbreakable” cane (fig. 10). Sumner, seated at his desk, wedged in the tight space by his long legs, reared up and fell to the floor. All the while Brooks beat him so badly

that his cane broke.²⁷ And so did the desk. And so did the nation.

Charles Sumner never fully recovered from the shock of the beating. He spent years abroad rallying for long periods of time and acting as his old self, and other times looking for doctors to treat his pain. Each time he tried to return to the Senate he became disabled, unable to think clearly. While Sumner was going through his physical and mental crisis, Crawford was diagnosed with a brain tumor behind his left eye.²⁸ Both young men were wounded in their prime.

Crawford’s eye began to bother him in October 1856 and he worried about being able to work. He and Louisa sought out doctors in Paris and London, but no matter what they did, little if anything alleviated the symptoms. He wrote Meigs in November that the plaster cast of Freedom was completed and suggested that it be cast in bronze in Germany at the Royal Bavarian Foundry. It would be 19 feet 6 inches tall and weigh approximately 15,000 pounds. The casting did not happen, as Crawford became increasingly ill.²⁹

By the end of 1856, Crawford’s sight and ability to work long hours were greatly compromised. He had an operation that did not improve the condition of his eye or his health. In spite of his suffering, Crawford reportedly remained cheerful while hiding his pain, and had Louisa attend to the business side of the studio.³⁰

Sumner landed in Paris in March 1857 and immediately set out to find Crawford. He entered in his journal that he looked for Crawford in two hotels but “could hear nothing of him.” On March 25, Sumner at last found where Crawford lodged, but could not see him, “his wife told me of his condition, which is sad. I went away sorrowful.”³¹

On March 29, he recorded; “Beautiful day; called again at Crawford’s; his wife told me that he had



**Fig. 8C. House of Representative doors,
by Thomas Crawford, bronze,
installed 1905.**

expressed a desire to see me. The diseased eye was covered with a shade; but the other eye and his face looked well. The fateful disease seems, however daily to assert its power, and has already touched the brain. I held his hand, and expressed my fervent good wishes, and then after a few minutes left. I was told that it would not do to stay long. . . . The whole visit moved me much. This beautiful genius seems to be drawing to its close.”³²

In April, Meigs wrote Crawford that the Statue of Freedom would be cast in America. He wanted the art of casting encouraged in America, and for a better price. Crawford still wanted it to be cast in Germany. It was not to be; seven months after Sumner’s visit, Crawford died in London. He was buried in New York City. Both of his friends, Sumner and Greene, were pallbearers.

On May 12, 1858, the day before Sumner departed for a visit to Rome he wrote his friend Longfellow, “I have been in Naples, visited Paestum, which I had never seen before, and the ancient cities and driving near the rolling, fiery lava. All this was interesting; but nothing touched me like Rome. Constantly I think of early days when I saw everything here with such fidelity, under the advantage of health I do not now possess, and of the boundless hope for the future which long ago closed on me. . . . Of course, in my wanderings I cannot forget the friends, one of whom is dead (Crawford), who initiated me in Rome; and that happiest summer of my life is revived in all that I now see and do, with longings that I could have it back, but not, I think, on the condition that I should live the intervening years over again.”³³

On this trip Sumner visited Crawford’s Roman studio. He seemed unsure of the completion of the doors for the Capitol. He may not have understood the way Crawford worked and did not have confi-

dence that they could be finished without Crawford’s hand. He wrote Julia Ward Howe’s husband Samuel, “Crawford’s studio interested me much; but I was strongly of the opinion that it would be best to abandon all idea of continuing the Senate and House of Representative doors. His sketches seemed to be in a very crude





Fig. 9. "The Politics and Poetry of New England," photograph of Charles Sumner and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow by Alexander Gardner, 1863.

condition; so that if the doors were finished according to them, I fear they would not come up to his great fame, or sustain the competition of the careful works of other artists, and if the sketches were completed by another hand, then the work would in great measure cease to be Crawford's. His well-filled studio testified to his active, brilliant career. To me it was full of peculiar interest. It was just twenty years before that I found him poor, struggling on three hundred dollars a year, but showing the genius that has since born such fruit. Then, I predicted that if I ever came again to Rome I should find him living in a palace,—in a palace, but not living, alas."³⁴

Crawford never saw the Statue of Freedom that we can see today. After a rough voyage across the sea, with emergency stops in Gibraltar and Bermuda, docking in New York City, the plaster cast was shipped to Washington. The work on the Dome was nearing completion. The statue was cast in bronze at the foundry of Clark Mills, which had continued working throughout the Civil War. Philip Reid, an enslaved worker at the foundry, disassembled the plaster cast and tended the fires for the bronze casting. The final section of the statue was placed on top of the Dome on

Fig. 10. A detail from "Argument of the Chivalry," by Winslow Homer, printed by John H. Buford, Boston, 1856.



December 2, 1863. There was little fanfare or celebration. The war raged on.

In the years after Crawford's death, Sumner was a vocal and persistent voice for the freeing of the slaves. When Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, he promised Sumner the signing pen (fig. 11).³⁵

One hopes that Louisa with their four children were able to see the finished Capitol. When Crawford died, Annie was eleven, Jeannie was ten, Mary was six, and Francis (Frankie) was only three years old. All went on to lead interesting lives; Francis became the bestselling author Francis Marion Crawford and Mary wrote memoirs and novels under her married name of Mrs. Hugh Fraser.

Crawford's sculp-



Fig. 11. The pen President Abraham Lincoln used to sign the Emancipation Proclamation was given to Charles Sumner to pass along to Massachusetts abolitionist George Livermore. MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

tural impact continues to be significant. His majestic Statue of Freedom (fig. 12) and other bronze and marble works continue to grace the Capitol. His friendship with Charles Sumner helped make his career possible, as did the confidence that Meigs and Davis had in his ability. His devotion to his vision is made manifest before our eyes in his Capitol sculptures; his name and his Statue of Freedom deserve to be better known.

At the Second Inaugural of our first African American president, Senator Schumer said, “When the Civil War threatened to bring construction of the Dome to a halt, workers pressed onward, even without pay, until Congress approved additional funding to complete the Dome that would become a symbol of unity and democracy to the entire world.” During this 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and completion of the United States Capitol with the



placement of the Statue of Freedom: Stop. Look Up. Behold.

Katya Miller is an author, video-grapher, and jewelry designer based in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her research into the iconography of the Statue of Freedom led to her interest in Crawford and Sumner's friendship. She is a recent recipient of a United States Capitol Historical Society fellowship to support her further research. She is writing a book about the statue that she hopes to make into a documentary film. Please visit www.LadyFreedom.net and contact her with comments at miller.katya@gmail.com.

Fig. 12. Crawford's *Statue of Freedom* was erected atop the dome of the Capitol in 1863, the same year the Emancipation Proclamation was issued.

Notes

1. Robert Gale, *Thomas Crawford: American Sculptor* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), p. 10.
2. Sylvia E. Crane, *White Silence: Greenough, Powers, and Crawford, American Sculptors in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Coral Gables, Fla., 1972), p. 408.
3. Ibid., p. 294.
4. Edward L. Pierce, *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 4 vols. (Boston, 1877–93), 2:95.
5. Ibid., 2:274.
6. Gale, *Thomas Crawford*, p. 21.
7. Louise Hall Tharp, *Three Saints and a Sinner: Julia Ward Howe, Annie, Louisa and Sam Ward* (Boston, 1956), p. 8.
8. Ibid. p. 47. Louisa's father died in 1839.
9. Ibid. p. 121.
10. Crane, *White Silence*, p. 350.
11. Thomas B Bromberg, “The Evolution of Crawford's Washington,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 70 (1962):3–29.
12. Crane, *White Silence*, p. 351.
13. Ibid., p. 347.
14. Ibid., p. 347.
15. Gale, *Thomas Crawford*, p. 189.
16. William C. Allen, *History of the United States Capitol* (Washington, D.C., 2001), p. 245. Everett is also known as the speaker who gave a two-hour oration prior to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.
17. Crane, *White Silence*, p. 73.
18. Ibid., p. 364.
19. Allen, *History of the United States Capitol*, p. 325.
20. Ibid., p. 246.
21. Ibid., p. 280.
22. Ibid., p. 198.
23. Ibid., p. 255.
24. Gale, *Thomas Crawford*, p. 56.
25. Allen, *History of the United States Capitol*, p. 255.
26. Ibid. p. 255.
27. Tharp, *Three Saints and a Sinner*, p. 224.
28. Gale, *Thomas Crawford*, p. 164.
29. Allen, *History of the United States Capitol*, p. 255.
30. Gale, *Thomas Crawford*, p. 164.
31. Ibid., p. 182.
32. Ibid., p. 182.
33. Pierce, *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 3: 67.
34. Ibid., 3:67.
35. Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York, 2004), p. 182.