

Charles Gates Dawes

(1865-1951)

Accomplished in the fields of law, finance, and government service, Charles Gates Dawes served a single term as vice president under Calvin Coolidge between 1925 and 1929. Born in Marietta, Ohio, Dawes studied law in Cincinnati, practiced in Nebraska, and tried his hand at both public-utility management and banking. He served as comptroller of the currency for the U.S. Treasury from 1898 to 1901, and by 1902 he had organized his own bank, the Central Trust Company of Illinois.

Dawes later distinguished himself as a U.S. Army officer during World War I, coordinating supply procurement and distribution for both American and allied troops and rising to the rank of brigadier general. In 1921 Dawes became the first director of the Bureau of the Budget, and in 1925 he shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Sir Austen Chamberlain for leadership of the reparations committee that stabilized Germany's postwar finances.

As 30th vice president and presiding officer of the Senate, Dawes was critical of certain Senate practices, especially the filibuster, which allows for unlimited debate. Neither he nor Coolidge sought reelection in 1928, and Dawes subsequently was appointed ambassador to Great Britain, a post he held until 1932. In that year, Dawes became chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and, until his death in 1951, he was a leading Chicago banker. Dawes wrote several books, including *Notes as Vice President, 1928-1929*.



Charles Dawes poses for the camera, having just been nominated for the vice presidency on the Republican ticket, August 25, 1924.

(Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

With directness and insight, renowned portrait sculptor Jo Davidson has captured the intelligence and purposefulness of one of the fascinating figures of 20th-century American political life. Davidson, who was an acquaintance of Charles Dawes, was selected to execute the statesman's likeness for the Senate's Vice Presidential Bust Collection. He completed the Dawes bust in his Paris studio in 1930 and shipped it to Washington in January 1931. Although it was promptly installed in the Senate wing of the U.S. Capitol, the Joint Committee on the Library did not authorize payment to the sculptor until 1935.

Davidson sets a lean, sober head above the wing shirt collar that was Dawes's sartorial trademark. Together with the pipe and centrally parted hair, this idiosyncratic collar signifies in Dawes a man who delighted in ignoring tradition and cutting through red tape in search of efficiency.

Davidson was principally a modeler in clay, whose work often remained in that medium or was cast in bronze. He did carve marble, and the Senate may have required such a bust to complement the marble pieces already in the vice presidential collection. In any case, Davidson would have worked with clay initially, and some of the naturalistic detail characteristic of Davidson's modeling would likely have been lost in the translation into marble. A restrained realism is apparent in the neck and face, and the structure of the skull is carefully rendered, especially the eye sockets and brow. It is surprising that the pupils of the eyes are not drilled or incised, but in many of Davidson's clay heads the eyes are veiled in

Charles G. Dawes

Jo Davidson (1883-1952)

Marble, 1930

17 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 19 x 9 inches (45.4 x 48.3 x 22.9 cm)

Signed and dated (on back of subject's right shoulder): Jo DAVIDSON / 1930

Commissioned by the Joint Committee on the Library, ca. 1929-1931

Accepted by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1931

Cat. no. 22.00030



shadow and perhaps not incised. What is mysterious in the rougher clay becomes expressionless in marble. The artist's reputation for speed in modeling and for spontaneity of pose is confirmed by the skewed position of jacket lapels and tie, resulting from the turn of the sitter's head.

Davidson was widely admired and treated as a social equal by many of the illustrious men and women—from James Joyce to Helen Keller—whom he modeled. He was fascinated with portraiture, and he was even more captivated by the personalities of his sitters:

My approach to my subjects was very simple. I never had them pose but we just talked about everything in the world. . . . As they talked, I got an immediate insight into the sitters. . . .

. . . . I often wondered what it was that drove me to make busts of people. It wasn't so much that they had faces that suggested sculpture. . . . What interested me was the people themselves—to be with them, to hear them speak and watch their faces change.¹

Davidson instinctively responded to dominant personalities and usually produced a convincing fusion of the physical and intellectual or spiritual aspects of his sitters. His strong portrait of Charles Dawes is no exception.

Among Davidson's most famous works is a seated portrait of writer and art patron Gertrude Stein, whose massive bulk inspired Guy Péné du Bois to write, "Miss Stein in this portrait might be the mother of us all."² Stein, in turn, wrote a "prose portrait" of Davidson, which was published in *Vanity Fair*. A fast worker, Davidson never reverted to formulaic renderings but always allowed the subject's character to speak through the art.

A marble likeness of Vice President Henry Wallace by Davidson (p. 384) is also in the U.S. Senate, and Davidson's full-length statues of Senator Robert M. La Follette, Sr., and humorist Will Rogers are located in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall Collection.

Photographer Man Ray captures sculptor Jo Davidson at work in his studio as he sculpts the clay model of author Gertrude Stein, 1922.

(National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution © 2000
Man Ray Trust/Artists Rights Society, NY/ADAGP, Paris)

