

ARTHUR CLIFTON GOODWIN

AMERICAN 1864-1929

PLATE 9

The Wharf and Custom House Tower,
ca. 1915

Oil on canvas

21 x 17 in.

Signed lower right: A. C. Goodwin



PLATE 10

Winter Twilight, Old Chatham,
ca. 1921-28

Oil on canvas

31 1/2 x 36 1/4 in.

Signed lower left: A. C. Goodwin

Described by the art historian Lionello Venturi (1885-1961) as a “forgotten American painter,” Arthur C. Goodwin was one of the great interpreters of the city of Boston.¹ He moved there around 1900 from Chelsea, Massachusetts, where he was raised. Soon after, the artist Louis Kronberg befriended Goodwin, then in his mid thirties, and encouraged him to explore the streets and parks of the city and record his immediate impressions using pastel, a medium that he soon mastered. This experience instilled in Goodwin a lifelong affection for Boston and the desire to capture its distinctive scenery cloaked in the mists of morning fog or covered in snow at twilight. The artist’s preference for depicting the city in dreary weather earned him the nickname, “Sloppy Weather Goodwin.”

Goodwin was especially drawn to areas where the urban environment meets the natural world on the borders of parks, piers, and bridges. While his work was not affiliated with any one school of artists, stylistically he is indebted to the aesthetics of Impressionism and Tonalism, and thematically, in his focus on urban themes, he is linked to the Ash Can School. A favorite subject was T Wharf, near the Quincy Markets, which Goodwin captured in a series of canvases featured in several exhibitions beginning in the 1910s.² In this example (plate 9), the artist combines the edge of the wharf with a distant view of the Custom House Tower. The tower was added to the original nineteenth-century building between 1913 and 1915 by the architectural firm Peabody and Stearns, and became the city’s tallest building at 496 feet. Goodwin was captivated by the nobility of the slim, granite-clad tower which dominated the Boston skyline. The composition’s vertical orientation enhances the upward thrust of the delicate masts of the docked boats, set against the stately tower as it looms over the low horizon of the city, cast in a soft hush of freshly fallen snow.

In 1920 Goodwin moved to New York City and rented a studio on Washington Square where he continued to pursue his interest in urban subjects. Soon after, he married Jean Allen Safford and the couple spent part of the year at their country retreat in Chatham, New York. Though far removed from Boston, paintings such as *Winter Twilight, Old Chatham* (plate 10) demonstrate Goodwin’s continued concentration on winter scenes and his effective use of subtle color and tonal harmonies to convey the quietude of dusk. This work, also in the Clark Collection, is among the artist’s most impressive and largest treatments of this picturesque region in upstate New York.

1. Lionello Venturi, “A. C. Goodwin: The Artist,” in *A.C. Goodwin 1864-1929* (1946; reprint, Los Angeles, CA: De Ville Galleries, 1986).

2. Scenes of T Wharf and the Custom House were included in exhibitions at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1913 and 1916; Guild of Boston Artists in 1919; Doll and Richards, Boston in 1915; and Milch Galleries, New York in 1921.

