

Charles Eliot Norton and the Founding of the
Archaeological Institute of America
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Scholar, translator, editor, and reformer, Charles Eliot Norton founded the Archaeological Institute of America in 1879 as part of his crusade to revive in America an awareness of its European heritage. After the Civil War, deeply disturbed about the intellectual and cultural decline in America, he moved to Europe, but his Puritan conscience led to his return in 1873, after five years abroad. He became a prophet of the European tradition, of taste, and of the widened horizons to an America now culturally enmeshed in moneymaking, realism, and applied science. In 1875, he became chairman of a new art history department at Harvard University, the first of its kind in America. Four years later, in the spring of 1879, he wrote and, with the help of others, issued a proposal that a society be established "for the purpose of furthering and directing archaeological investigation and research." The Archaeological Institute of America was born. "Archaeology," he later wrote, "has indefinitely lengthened our view of human life...into a past hardly dreamed of by our ancestors." He was particularly interested in disseminating to Americans knowledge of ancient Greek language and culture. By 1882, the Institute had founded the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, and a migration of American scholars to Greece had begun. Norton continued his deep interest in the Institute until his death. While he lived, he was felt to *be* the Institute, which as associate once called the "Archaeological Institute of Shady Hill," the name of Norton's home in Cambridge.

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