

'The Most Distinguished Ancient Worthies of Our Country'

LAUREN B. HEWES

THE AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY, established in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1812, was founded to encourage the 'collection and preservation of the Antiquities of our country, and of curious and valuable productions of Art and Nature [that] have a tendency to enlarge the sphere of human knowledge, aid the progress of Science, perpetuate the history of moral and political events, and improve and instruct posterity.'¹ The emphasis on the printed history of the nation and the lives of its residents soon developed under the leadership of the Society's founder and first president, Isaiah Thomas (cat.

I would like to thank the entire staff of the American Antiquarian Society, both past and present, for their assistance during every phase of this publication. The scope of the project, with its parallel investigations into works of art, the Society's history of collecting, and New England genealogy, meant that I had the good fortune to interact with just about every librarian and specialist under the 'generous dome.' Particular thanks are owed to Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Graphic Arts Georgia B. Barnhill who, with her amazing knowledge of the portrait collection, proved to be absolutely indispensable. Thanks also to Manuscript Curator Thomas G. Knoles who assisted patiently with many, many queries and also provided access to the Society's voluminous archives and correspondence files. My appreciation also to Director of Scholarly Programs Caroline F. Sloat who so intelligently sorted, edited, and re-arranged the publication into its present form.

A final word of recognition for all of those wise, bygone figures who preserved and protected the holdings of the American Antiquarian Society, many of whom are discussed at length in this publication. Because of the original vision of Isaiah Thomas and those who followed him, saving and cataloguing every scrap of the past, the story of the Society's portrait collection has extraordinary depth. For the richness of period detail, the documentation of the valued stories that a portrait carries through time, and for the wonderful historical minutiae that are now linked to each image, I am entirely in their debt.

1. Preamble to 'An Act to Incorporate the American Antiquarian Society,' October 24, 1812, *Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* 6 (Boston, 1812): 142.

LAUREN B. HEWES is project bibliographer for the Print Council of America and a former associate curator at Shelburne Museum. She writes about American nineteenth-century portraiture, with an emphasis on New England artists.

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123 et seq.).² Seven years after its founding, a Society member declared: 'The objects of this Institution are commensurate with the lapse of time, and its benefits will be more and more accumulating in the progression of the ages. As the Antiquities of our country, by various means, are rapidly decreasing, an Institution whose business will be to collect and preserve such as remain and can be obtained must be viewed as highly important.'³ The Society's library has always been the heart of the institution, incorporating early American books, newspapers, broadsides, prints, and manuscripts. Since 1812, the staff of the Society has been dedicated to enlarging and providing access to the collection, making AAS one of only a few depositories of its kind in the nation.

Although preserving 'curious and valuable productions of Art,' was to be one of the missions for which the American Antiquarian Society was chartered, it did not actively collect European or American painting aside from portraiture, nor did it ever establish a separate gallery for the display of fine art.⁴ The Society acquired its first portrait in 1814, two years after the institution was founded. In that year the portrait of the loyalist Charles Paxton (cat. 94), thought at the time to be the work of John Singleton Copley (1737-1815), was given by a donor identified in the Society's records only as 'a Lady.' In 1815, when Isaiah Thomas persuaded an heir to Boston's Mather family dynasty to part with the remains of the famous Mather library, the acquisition included not only rare volumes written and owned by the Mathers but also five early portraits of various members of the family, the images of Richard (cat. 82) and Cotton Mather (cat. 79) being the most prized. In 1819 a Society member, the Reverend William Bentley (cat. 8), bequeathed his library, all of his manuscripts, his extensive print collection, and objects from his 'cabinet,' including eleven painted portraits, mostly copies of earlier images of well-known clergymen and governors. As the American Antiquarian Society did not complete construction of the first of its three library buildings (fig. 1) until 1820, it is uncertain where the

2. For a summary of the history of the American Antiquarian Society, see *Under Its Generous Dome: The Collections and Programs of the American Antiquarian Society*, Nancy H. Burkett and John B. Hench, eds. (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1992).

3. Oliver Fiske, 'Address to the Members of the American Antiquarian Society,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (February 1819): 140.

4. Similar institutions in the region, such as the Massachusetts Historical Society, founded in 1791, and the Boston Athenaeum, opened in 1807, both featured public painting galleries.

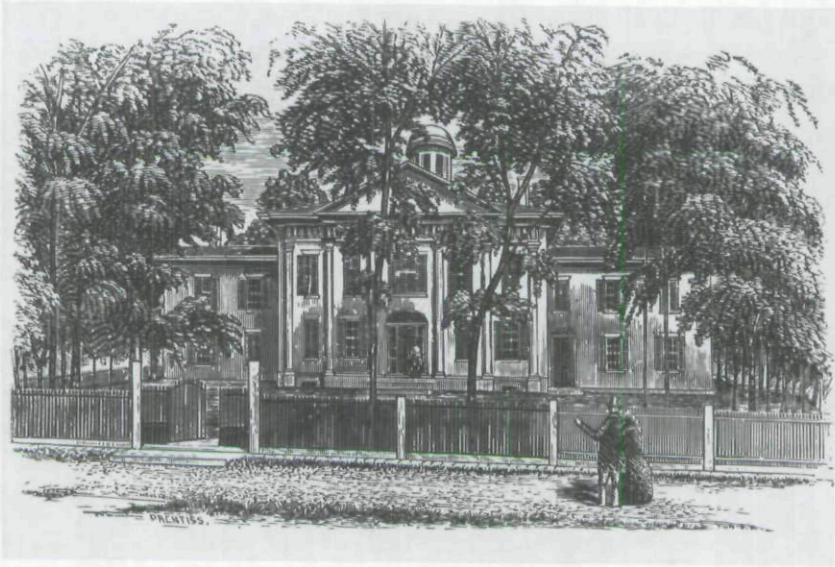


Fig. 1. Exterior of the first library building (1820–54), located at the corner of Belmont Street and Summer Street. This engraving by Prentiss shows the maturing trees that Christopher Columbus Baldwin (cats. 2–3) personally transplanted from the woods.

Paxton, Mather, and Bentley portraits, numbering seventeen in all, were displayed. The Mather library was kept in Thomas's house on Court Hill in Worcester, and it is probable the portraits remained there until construction of the nearby public building was complete.

In 1830 the Society was offered an important portrait of John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts (cat. 153), which, given the historical nature of the portrait collection at that time, was enthusiastically accepted. The Society's Council stated: 'The portrait of the earliest and worthiest of the Governors of Massachusetts, the venerable John Winthrop, whose memory is more cherished and grows greener and brighter as the pen of the antiquarian more illustrates his good works . . . has been received and placed with the other memorials of the great and good.'⁵ The preservation of these early images of prominent Americans, men who were directly connected to the history of the na-

5. William Lincoln, 'Report of the Committee on the Library,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (October 1830): 237.

tion, visually fulfilled the Society's desire to 'perpetuate the history of moral and political events.' Initially, portraits were viewed by the Society as historical documents, similar to the eighteenth-century texts, rare political pamphlets, and newspapers the institution was collecting in earnest.

The bequest of Isaiah Thomas's portrait (cat. 123) after his death in 1831 added a new dimension to the portrait collection and instituted the Society's practice of memorializing its own leaders and members through portraiture. Thomas's portrait, painted in 1818, must initially have looked somewhat out of place, hanging with the images of eighteenth-century clerics and colonial politicians. However, Thomas's likeness was soon joined by those of other AAS worthies. In 1836 the Society commissioned its first portrait, a posthumous likeness of its popular and energetic librarian Christopher Columbus Baldwin (cat. 3). The commission memorialized Baldwin, who had died at the age of thirty-five in a carriage accident while on Society business in Ohio. At the dedication of the portrait, it was specifically stated that such portraits were intended to serve as tributes to the sitter's contributions to the institution: 'The Council, desirous of affording a testimonial of their sense of the high merit and deep devotion of the late librarian to the service of the Society, have procured [his] portrait . . . that the living image of an associate so valued and a friend so loved may remain in our halls, as his memory will continue in the hearts of those who knew his worth, and the ardor of his enthusiasm in those pursuits to which our institution has been dedicated.'⁶

Portraits depicting AAS presidents and librarians were commissioned throughout the nineteenth century and were prominently displayed in the Society's public spaces. As a patron of the arts, the Society commissioned conservative artists who were solid members of the nation's art establishment. Chester Harding (1792-1866), the best-known artist in Boston in the 1830s, painted the portrait of Baldwin in 1836, and Daniel Huntington (1816-1906), head of the National Academy of Design and vice president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was chosen to paint Stephen Salisbury II in 1878 (cat. 101). The Society

6. Rejoice Newton, 'Report of the Council,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (May 25, 1836): 328-29.

commissioned portraits into the twentieth century, but since the 1950s has sidestepped the patronage issue by asking each sitter to select a painter and present the finished portrait to the institution.

The Society's portrait collection, which today numbers 164 painted portraits, miniatures, and busts, continues to have these two primary functions: visually recording the history of the Society and of the broader American population.⁷ Although it does contain groups of objects that were originally gathered by one person, such as the Reverend William Bentley's eleven images, it is truly an institutional collection, and as such, illustrates the variety of perspectives displayed by the Society over the course of nearly two centuries. While the collections of athenaeums, historical societies, and cabinets of curiosities have all been studied in detail because of their contributions to the preservation of the arts, little research has been done on the art collecting practices of America's earliest, non-museum institutions. Such public institutions in the U.S. as libraries, hospitals, and schools were then actively commissioning and purchasing art. They primarily acquired portraits, hanging likenesses of their leaders and associates in public spaces as a means of self-promotion. Art, especially portraiture, was perceived as a utilitarian means of propagandizing the function of the institution and reminding future staff of the individuals and ideas that preceded them.

While the American Antiquarian Society had much in common with these non-museum institutions, its historical role also meant that portraits of major American figures were part of the collection, along with commissioned portraits of institutional leaders. But because the Society was not an art museum, it did not limit itself to the collection of only aesthetically perfect canvases by famed artists. Although works by important painters such as Peter Pelham and Christian Gullager became part of the collection in the nineteenth century, the assembling of representative works of period artists was not a collecting objective at that time. Portraits were accepted because of the subjects depicted, not because of the talents of the artists who created them. An 1841 visitor to the Society commented on the importance of the men whose likenesses

7. The Society also possesses a substantial collection of portrait silhouettes, engravings, lithographs, daguerreotypes, and other photographs, which are not included in this publication.

were displayed, stating, 'The portraits of many of the most distinguished ancient worthies of our country adorn the different halls . . . some of them curious specimens of the art of design.'⁸ The priority accorded to the subjects of the Society's portraits continued to be observed in the twentieth century. In 1920 Henry Cunningham (cat. 36) stressed the differences between the American Antiquarian Society and museums, writing that the Society was 'in a better position to preserve [portraits of Americans] than are the great art museums that must collect pictures on all subjects and must lay stress on the artistic character of the picture more than on the subject. . . .'⁹ As the overall purpose of the American Antiquarian Society—collecting historical documents—outweighed traditional art museum dictums and definitions of value, the idiosyncrasies of the institution prevailed, and the Society successfully merged the collecting styles of museums and other institutions in its American portrait collection.

The purpose and philosophy of an institution such as the American Antiquarian Society are refined over time. Thus, the Society's style of portrait collecting in any given decade reflects the ideas of current leadership. In 1854 the Society moved into its second home, a new and larger building on Lincoln Square in Worcester. There, the portraits and busts were used to decorate offices and stack areas and were often installed high above the floor, out of view of most patrons (figs. 2–3). In the last half of the nineteenth century the portrait collection, like the library holdings, entered a dormant phase as the Society struggled to define its place in the industrial age. During that period, the Society's publications were written almost exclusively by its members and promoted the personal agendas of its leaders. The organization was in danger of becoming an exclusive club, with a very narrow and internal focus divergent from Thomas's original vision. Predictably, between 1860 and 1890 only fifteen portraits were added to the collection, and most were images of Society members, such as Edward Dillingham Bangs (cat. 5) and Isaac Davis (cat. 39).

8. 'Antiquarian Hall, Worcester,' *Hingham Patriot* (Massachusetts), January 2, 1841.

9. Henry W. Cunningham, 'Report of the Council,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 30 (April 1920): 7–8.



Fig. 2. The second Antiquarian Hall, built in 1854, nearly doubled the library's shelf space. In this photograph of the northside annex looking east (c. 1908), the portrait of Alexander von Humboldt (cat. 70) can be seen to the left of the doorway and a lithograph of Daniel Webster (cats. 140-42) to the right. Through the archway hangs the portrait of John May (cat. 86).



Fig. 3. Portraits hanging in the Librarian's Room (c. 1908) included (from left) Stephen Salisbury II (cat. 101), Thomas Lindall Winthrop (cat. 156), and Isaiah Thomas, Sr. (cat. 123).

The turn of the twentieth century brought substantial change to AAS. In 1910, with funds from the generous bequest of Stephen Salisbury III (cat. 102), the Society completed construction of its third and current building on Salisbury Street in Worcester. The move to these quarters offered the staff the opportunity to reconsider all aspects of the collection. Cabinet curiosities such as shells, coins, arrow points, a mummy, and plaster casts of European sculpture were sold or given to other institutions as the Society determined to expand its growing library collection. The portrait collection was retained because of its close connection to the history of the institution and was moved to the new building. Separated for the first time from the primary stack area, portraits were hung in the entryway, in office spaces, and in the large domed reading room.

Fortunately, the Society's new librarian, Clarence S. Brigham (cat. 11), had an interest in American portraiture. Two members of the Society, Henry W. Cunningham (cat. 36) and Clarence W. Bowen (cat. 10), encouraged Brigham to collect portraits more actively. These members often recommended works for acquisition and eventually donated portraits from their own collections. In 1920 Cunningham made an official call for portrait donations, writing in the *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*: '[T]he Society at the present time is anxious to acquire early American portraits. In the old building on Lincoln Square there was little room for pictures, and those which we had seemed a large collection. But in the new building, with its abundant wall space, excellent lighting and fine setting for portraits, we could hang to advantage many paintings. It seems quite strange that this Society, which for one hundred and eight years has been the object of many valuable gifts, has not received more colonial portraits by the better-known artists. . . . Therefore the Society stands ready to receive gifts of this character. It is an excellent opportunity for members and friends to place their old American portraits where they will be preserved and valued and where they can be seen by students.'¹⁰

Members were slow to respond to Cunningham's request, but over the next ten years Bowen did coordinate the donations of eight portraits.

10. Cunningham, 'Report of the Council,' 6-7.

Many of these images, including Winthrop Chandler's self-portrait (cat. 27) and the 1792 portrait of Samuel Dexter (cat. 41), were discovered by Bowen in private collections during the course of his research for the multi-volume *History of Woodstock, Connecticut*. He encouraged Brigham to write to the portraits' owners, extolling the Society's fire-proof structure and educational mission and urging them to donate their paintings. In addition, Bowen was able to convince the Society to seek out likenesses of former Society presidents such as Edward Everett (cat. 47) and to commission portraits of both Waldo Lincoln (cat. 74) and Calvin Coolidge (cat. 33), thereby continuing the collection's memorial function.

The 1930s saw the most rapid expansion of the Society's portrait collection, which was parallel to the institution's overall growth. Brigham acquired every newspaper, early imprint, pamphlet, and book that he could afford, so that the library collection, which numbered 99,000 volumes in 1908, had increased to 600,000 by 1939. Forty-three portraits, nearly the same number acquired in the entire nineteenth century, were added to the collection between 1930 and 1939, including the c. 1690 portrait of Maria Catherine Smith (cat. 104) and the charming 1838 miniature of the Foster children (cat. 53). Even the residual effects of the Great Depression did not curtail donations of portraits in the 1930s, and in 1933 financial reverses suffered by descendants of the artist David Claypool Johnston led to one of the Society's few portrait purchases. Members raised the funds needed to acquire a substantial group of Johnston's original watercolors and prints, accompanied by a portrait of the artist (cat. 72).

The Johnston purchase continued the Society's practice of acquiring portraits as supplemental material associated with major additions to the library, a strategy first employed by Isaiah Thomas in 1815 with the acquisition of the Mather family books and portraits. The self-portrait of Bass Otis (cat. 91) accompanied a large gift of American books, lithographs, and manuscript materials (fig. 4) that was donated over a number of years in the late 1920s and 1930s. In the 1940s the growth of the portrait collection slowed. Many of the images added were of individuals closely affiliated with the Society's manuscript holdings. Miniatures of members of the Foster and Craigie families accompanied papers,



Fig. 4. A page from the notebook of Bass Otis with entries dated between 1815 and 1854. This small volume contains notes, sketches (such as this one titled 'Caleb Cresson's Children'), and other information about Otis's work as an artist and portrait painter in antebellum Philadelphia.

journals, and letters donated by descendants.¹¹ The direct association with library and manuscript materials gives these portraits added resonance, and the portraits, in turn, personify individuals represented in the letters, diaries, and ledgers.

In the late 1940s and 1950s a number of portraits of Isaiah Thomas and members of his family became available through descendants and Boston art dealers and were subsequently added to the collection. The acquisition of these images reflects the Society's ongoing enthusiasm for objects affiliated with its own history, an enthusiasm that was heightened as the institution approached its 150th anniversary in 1962. When the Thomas family images were acquired, the Society also commissioned several portraits of more recent leaders, such as Clarence Brigham (cat. 11) and Thomas Streeter (cat. 113), in a continuing effort

11. Later, miniatures of the Johnson (cat. 71) and Everett (cats. 44-46) families were donated with manuscript material, and in the 1980s full-size portraits of the Reverend Stephen Peabody (cat. 95) and the steamboat captain William Comstock (cat. 32) were accepted partly because their papers were already housed at the Society.



Fig. 5. Photographic portrait of Clifford (Ted) Shipton, the only AAS leader who declined sitting for a portrait. Librarian and director, he initiated the AAS microprint edition of rare American imprints based on Charles Evans's bibliography and compiled the first thirteen volumes of *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*.

to complete a roster of all of its previous presidents and directors.

In the nearly two hundred years of institutional history, only one leader of the Society was not the subject of a formal portrait.¹² This was Clifford K. Shipton (1902–73), the Society's librarian from 1939 to 1960 and director from 1960 to 1967 (fig. 5), who made major contributions to the fields of bibliography and American history. He researched and wrote thirteen volumes of *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, recording the biographies of hundreds of influential Americans in the process. As librarian, Shipton was also responsible for initiating the production and distribution of the Readex Microprint edition of Charles Evans's *American Imprints Through 1800*, thereby making some 36,000 rare American imprints widely available to scholars. A colleague recalled: 'The protection of the originals by their multiplication and wide dispersal and the resultant 'democratization' of research in early American history and literature were [Shipton's] only, and for him truly suffi-

12. Samuel Eliot Morison (1887–1976), president of the Society's Council during Clarence S. Brigham's tenure, was photographed but was never painted. After 1881, the only librarians painted were those who also served as director or president of the Society.

cient, rewards, which he valued equally as he read the articles and books that poured forth . . . based in part on his great bibliographical and micro-publishing accomplishments.¹³ It was not until 1973, some years after his retirement, that Shipton was asked to sit for his portrait. He responded without enthusiasm: 'Had the matter of the picture come up when I first retired, I would have humored you boys, but after seven years of normal aging and a heart attack, I don't look like anything you want to hang on the wall. In fact, I look like a basset hound who has been left out in the rain.' The retired director felt that a painted portrait was unnecessary, adding, 'In this day of photographs the oil portrait has lost its importance.'¹⁴ With Shipton's death in December of 1973, less than a month after he declined to sit for his portrait, the opportunity to paint his likeness from life was lost.

After 1960, the Society reverted to its custom of preserving portraits as historical documents. Unlike the earlier acquisitions of the likenesses of such leading figures in colonial America as Governor John Winthrop (cats. 153-55) or Cotton Mather (cats. 78-79), however, the more recently collected portraits represented entirely different segments of the nation's diverse population. The images of the nineteenth-century hat maker Benjamin Chapin (cat. 29) and the African-American barber John Moore, Jr. (cat. 87), men who were not affiliated with the Society, reflect the rebirth of the Society's interest in portraits as documentation. These acquisitions embodied the Society's continuing and democratic desire to preserve all aspects of early American history.

In the late 1960s, Georgia Brady Barnhill, now the Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Graphic Arts, joined the Society's map and print department. Barnhill was responsible for the painted portraits, although her primary role was to care for and make accessible the Society's premier collections of engravings, lithographs, maps, and broadsides. Her appointment as curator finally addressed a criticism expressed in 1824 that the Society lacked a manager for its 'cabinet' objects: 'The President and members of the Board have indeed all necessary authority and take

13. Lawrence W. Towner, 'Clifford K. Shipton,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 84 (April 1974): 26.

14. Clifford K. Shipton to James Russell Wiggins, November 7, 1973, AAS Archives.

care that [the objects] are protected from injury, but the undivided attention and labours of some fit person are absolutely required to arrange and keep them in order. . . . The expense would soon be reimbursed by preserving from decay or destruction the very objects for the protection of which the institution was formed.¹⁵ Over the years, Barnhill has surveyed the collection and continuously annotated and updated existing checklists. She has handled all loans, inquiries, and publication requests related to the collection and recommended portrait acquisitions and commissions. Before Barnhill became graphic arts curator, the painted portraits and busts were the responsibility of the librarian, whose attention was usually consumed by the management of rare books and documents and the needs of researchers using the Society's resources.

Although the American Antiquarian Society's portraits were never construed as a fine art collection, displayed in a formal gallery, or actively sought out by most visitors to the library, the collection has slowly become part of the nation's art historical record. By allowing copies to be made of major works, by participating in loan exhibitions, and by reproducing the portraits in a variety of publications, the Society has made much of its portrait collection available to scholars, historians, and students of American art.

In the nineteenth century, the Society's portrait collection contained nearly twenty painted replicas of original works, indicating that the institution was well aware of the ability of painted copies to disseminate the likenesses of famous Americans. In his own lifetime, Isaiah Thomas ordered the painting of two copies of his own portrait by Ethan Allen Greenwood (cat. 123), so that they could hang in the rooms of other institutions with which he was affiliated. Permission to copy the seventeenth-century portrait of Richard Mather (cat. 82) was given to the Connecticut Historical Society in 1854, and a copy of the portrait of the Unitarian leader Reverend Aaron Bancroft (cat. 4) was made for the Unitarian Association in Boston in 1886. Such painted copies were an accepted and expected part of the nineteenth-century museum experience. During an 1879 visit to the Society, a Worcester visitor took note

15. Editorial, *New York Daily Advertiser*, August 20, 1824.

of the famous visages, many of them known copies: 'Here may be seen the four Mathers, with their "high pious" scholarly faces, the Spanish faces of Vespuccius and Columbus, the latter a copy from an original . . . in the Royal Museum at Naples. Here are the portraits of John Endicott, first Governor of Massachusetts John Winthrop, John Chandler, the honest refugee . . . and scores of others.'¹⁶ The visitor was especially taken with the copy of Baron Alexander von Humboldt's likeness (cat. 70), 'a splendid work of art. Such near approach to flesh and blood in the way of coloring, I never saw in a portrait before; the silvery whiteness of the hair is marvelous.'¹⁷

The Society began participating in loan exhibitions in 1864, when it sent the five Mather family portraits to the National Sailors' Fair at the Boston Athenaeum. In 1891 several canvases, including the images of William Paine (cat. 93) and Samuel Foster Haven (cat. 65), were part of an exhibition entitled 'Portraits by American Artists' held at the Worcester Public Library (fig. 6). In the early twentieth century, loan activity increased dramatically. AAS portraits were included in seminal exhibitions such as the Hudson-Fulton Celebration of 1909, Harvard University's Tercentenary Exhibition of 1936, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 'Life in America' exhibition, which was held in conjunction with the 1939 World's Fair.

Although the Society had no formal loan policy during this period, the draft of a letter prepared by the Society's president in response to a 1939 loan request from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which included the portraits of Cotton Mather (cats. 78-79) and Hannah Ackley Bush (cat. 20), indicates that an informal policy restricting such loans did exist: 'They are three of the most interesting pictures in our entire collection, and as such are sought here by the many visitors who come to the Society, especially during the summer months. But even then I feel so favorably toward the Metropolitan Museum that I would vary

16. Sarah L. Staples, 'Letters from Worcester,' *The Patriot*, June 3, 1879. The portraits that Staples believed were of Vespuccius and Columbus (Weis 130 and 36), are today known to be copies of portraits after Parmigianino's (1503-40) likenesses of Italian noblemen, including Gian Galeazzo Santivale.

17. Staples. For additional discussion of fine art copies, see Ellen G. Miles, "'Memorials of great & good men who were my friends": Portraits in the Life of Oliver Wolcott, Jr.," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 107 (April 1998): 105-59.



Fig. 6. 'Portraits by American Artists,' an exhibition at the Worcester Public Library in 1891, included the portraits of Stephen Salisbury II (cat. 101, far lower left), and William Paine (cat. 93, upper middle).

our usual rule not to accede generally to such requests.'¹⁸ In the 1940s and 1950s the Society sent portraits to over a dozen exhibitions, including several monograph shows on individual artists such as John Greenwood, Winthrop Chandler, and Chester Harding.¹⁹

With the retirement of Brigham as the Society's director in 1959, the portrait collection lost one of its longtime advocates. Loan activity slowed while the Society expanded its visibility as a research library and resource center. From 1959 until 1970, only two objects were loaned from the portrait collection: the likeness of Timothy Swan (cat. 118) and the bust of Voltaire by Samuel McIntire (cat. 137). Writing to deny a loan request, director Clifford K. Shipton cited all the 'annoying red tape' required by the Society's insurance underwriter and said: 'We have a firm rule never to lend any of our pictures for exhibition, for the sim-

18. Draft of a letter from Clarence Brigham to Harry Wehle, February 25, 1939, AAS Archives. A handwritten note indicates that this letter was never sent.

19. These exhibitions were 'John Greenwood in America,' at the Addison Gallery, Andover, Massachusetts, 1942; 'Winthrop Chandler,' at the Worcester Art Museum, 1947; and 'Chester Harding, 1792-1886,' at the Connecticut Valley Historical Association, 1952.

ple reason that we never borrow any, so we get no return from an operation which does, despite the very best efforts, . . . result in a certain amount of wear and tear.²⁰

This policy was changed after 1970. When extensive renovations to the Society's main building were made in 1971, a majority of the portraits were sent to the nearby Worcester Art Museum for exhibition and storage. In the 1970s and 1980s, through the actions of Marcus A. McCorison, the Society's director, and Georgia Brady Barnhill, curator of graphic arts, objects from the portrait collection were widely loaned to numerous bicentennial celebrations and national exhibitions at institutions such as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.²¹ After the 1975 loan exhibition 'Paul Revere's Boston, 1735-1818,' McCorison's note to the organizers reveals the Society's enthusiasm for participating in such collaborations: 'We were absolutely delighted with the exhibit, the way in which the material was exhibited and with the catalogue. . . . I am happy that the American Antiquarian Society was asked to contribute to this exhibit.'²²

Although copies and loans make objects available to more viewers, they are not the most effective way to reach large audiences. Publication further promotes a collection, and portraits in the American Antiquarian Society's collection have been widely reproduced. The Society has included its portraits as illustrations in its own *Proceedings*, starting with the 1879 heliotype of Samuel Foster Haven's portrait (cat. 65), which has been followed in the modern era by dozens of photographic reproductions. In the 1950s, Brigham sent photographs of many portraits in the collection to the Frick Art Reference Library in New York to be made available to art researchers. Permission is liberally granted to museums, scholars, and private researchers to reproduce Society portraits in exhibition catalogues, historical texts, genealogies, local histories,

20. Clifford Shipton to Mrs. Henry M. Clark, Antiquarian and Landmark Society, March 12, 1962, AAS Archives.

21. These exhibitions included 'Paul Revere's Boston, 1735-1818,' Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1975; 'Paintings by New England Provincial Artists,' Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1976; and 'American Colonial Portraits,' National Gallery of Art, 1987.

22. Marcus McCorison to Jonathan Fairbanks, April 23, 1975, AAS Archives. This exhibition was held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

and biographical compilations. However, over eighty portraits, including most of the miniatures and nearly fifty full-size canvases, are reproduced for the first time in this volume, as the institution continues to increase access to its portrait collection via publication.

The first complete documentation of the American Antiquarian Society's portrait collection was published in 1876 by Nathaniel Paine (1832–1917), a Worcester banker with a keen interest in local history, who was also a member of the Society. In a brief article in *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, he listed fifty-five portraits owned by the Society.²³ The entries were arranged by media and included paintings, plaster and marble busts, and some engravings. Brief biographical information on the sitter, not always accurate, followed each entry. Paine may have been inspired to compile this information by the growing interest in American heritage associated with the Centennial of 1876, which was widely celebrated in Worcester. Despite errors and brevity, Paine's list is the first published indication that some Society members considered the portraits as a collection valued separately from the library holdings.

Forty-seven years later, in 1923, the Society published the first official checklist of the portrait collection, compiled by Waldo Lincoln (cat. 74). Published in the *Proceedings*, the checklist was prefaced by an essay highlighting the recent gift of five canvases of members of the Byles family and discussing several portraits of historical merit already in the collection. Echoing Henry Cunningham's 1920 call for donations, Lincoln wrote: 'It is singular that this Society . . . should possess so few portraits by early American artists and of distinguished American statesmen. Perhaps no important historical society is so weak in this particular, and the attention of members is now called to it, in the hope that they will interest themselves in the matter sufficiently to see to it, that eventually the somewhat limited wall space of this building is covered with examples of the work of more celebrated colonial artists which are now lacking.'²⁴ Lincoln's list of sixty-two portraits owned by

23. Nathaniel Paine, 'Portraits and Busts in Possession of the American Antiquarian Society and Other Associations in Worcester, Massachusetts,' *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 30 (January 1876): 22–24.

24. Waldo Lincoln, 'Report of the Council,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 33 (October 1923): 235–36.

the American Antiquarian Society is organized alphabetically by sitter and reflects the importance of the subjects depicted. The sitter's life dates, the name of the artist, and the identity of the donor follow each entry. Although Lincoln's list did not include sculpture or miniatures owned by the Society, it served as the first official inventory of a collection begun 109 years earlier.

The most significant documentation of the portrait collection was completed in 1946 by a Society member and genealogist, the Reverend Frederick Lewis Weis (1895–1966). Published in the *Proceedings* and as a separately bound pamphlet, Weis's *Checklist of the Portraits in the Library of the American Antiquarian Society* contains entries for 151 items, including oil portraits, miniatures, busts, chalk drawings, etched profiles on glass, and a mosaic thought to depict Christopher Columbus.²⁵ Weis focused his research on genealogical data about the sitters, including exact life dates and places of birth and death. He also cited publications in which the portraits were illustrated, relevant documentation found in the *Proceedings*, and partial exhibition histories. Weis omitted even the most basic biographical information about the artists, and seldom discussed any portrait at length in terms of its historical or artistic relevance. Only eight portraits were illustrated, all in black and white. Weis's checklist served the Society well. Numbers he assigned to each portrait became reference numbers for photographic negatives and archives notations. His citations simplified reference searches on the sitters, and the various indexes (by donor, artist, and occupation) provided many points of access to the collection that were previously unavailable.

While publications such as these successfully placed the American Antiquarian Society's portraits in the scholarly record, preserving the actual paintings required more direct action. Because of the Society's ongoing commitment to the preservation of its historic objects, the fragile, heat- and humidity-sensitive paintings in the portrait collection have been carefully maintained over the years. In 1838 the librarian

25. Frederick Lewis Weis, 'Checklist of Portraits in the Library of the American Antiquarian Society,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 56 (April 1946): 55–128. The chalk drawings, etchings, and mosaic are not included in the current volume. Two Italian portraits (Weis 36 and 130) have also been omitted.

reported: 'Several of the portraits . . . belonging to the Society, whose real merit was seriously obscured by the stains of time and the decay of the frames in which they were set, have been repaired and placed in frames more accordant with their value. Among these the ancient portrait of the first Governor of Massachusetts, the venerable Winthrop, bears striking evidence of improvement. The other portraits thus restored are those of the Mathers, whose brightened aspects may be easily fancied to express a lively appreciation of the courtesy extended to them.'²⁶

The Society's first building was not a friendly environment for portraits or early imprints. In 1849 a Society member reported: 'The building, as the Society is aware, is but illy fitted for the purpose of a library . . . The dampness of the rooms is such as to be very detrimental for the books and papers and render resort to the Library, except at midsummer, uncomfortable and unhealthy. The building itself is going to decay; the sills and floors rotting, the walls cracking and plastering becoming loose and falling.'²⁷ These conditions predicated the move to the Society's second facility in 1854, a larger, dryer structure newly erected for the purpose of holding a library but not, unfortunately, for displaying paintings. Portraits were hung randomly among the stacks and in the offices, often above heat sources or near open windows. The portrait collection survived these conditions without wholesale preservation until the twentieth century.

In 1908, just prior to the move to the Society's third building on Salisbury Street, the librarian announced that 'all' of the Society's portraits had been 'repaired.'²⁸ The work was done by a picture restorer in Boston whose receipts chronicle the linings and cleanings of numerous canvases and the removal of the portrait of John Winthrop (cat. 153)

26. Samuel Foster Haven, 'Librarian's Report,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (October 23, 1838): 366. The Treasurer's Report for 1839 lists an October 1838 expenditure of \$73.50 paid to the account of T. Keith for 'portrait frames, etc.'

27. Benjamin Franklin Thomas, 'Report of the Council,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (May 1849): 558.

28. Edmund M. Barton, 'Librarian's Report,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 19 (October 1908): 208. Not all of the Society's portraits were treated in 1908. Analysis of the receipts indicates that only fifteen paintings were restored at that time.



Fig. 7. The reading room in Antiquarian Hall is also a gallery for the display of portraits and sculptures. The portraits include, from left, Elijah Brigham (cat. 12), Stephen Salisbury III (cat. 102) and Samuel Foster Haven (cat. 65). The sculptures of Benjamin Franklin (cat. 54) and George Washington (cat. 138) flank the columns at the lower level; Robert Fulton (cat. 55) may be glimpsed in the balcony background behind Old No. 1, Isaiah Thomas's printing press. AAS photograph by Henry E. Peach.

from an oak panel.²⁹ These restorations were the first that many objects in the collection had ever undergone, and in 1910 the improved paintings were hung in the open spaces of the Society's new reading room, Antiquarian Hall, where many remain today (fig. 7).

In the 1930s and 1940s, as Frederick Lewis Weis was compiling his checklist, the American Antiquarian Society began to take advantage of the proximity and experience of the conservation department at the Worcester Art Museum. Portraits in need of repair were delivered to the art museum, where they were examined by Edmond de Beaumont, the museum's conservator. Under his direction several of the Society's portraits, including Christian Gullager's images of David West, Sr. (cat. 146), and David West, Jr. (cat. 147), were x-rayed in an effort to learn more about the painting techniques used to create them. In addition, de Beaumont supervised the first conservation survey of the Society's portrait collection, documenting verso labels, distinguishing marks, and recording condition concerns for a large portion of the collection.

29. Hermann Dudley Murphy to AAS, 1908, AAS Archives. Murphy, an artist and 'picture restorer,' maintained a studio in Copley Hall, Boston.

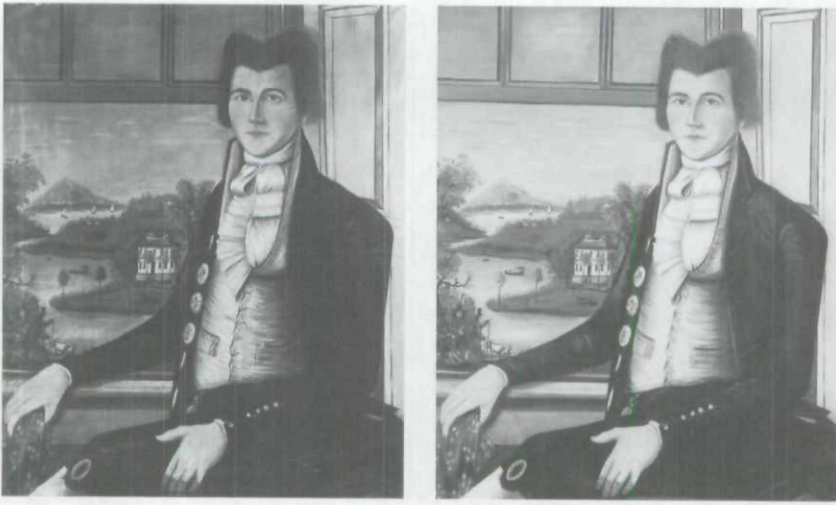


Fig. 8. The portrait of Timothy Swan (cat. 118) was conserved with funds granted by the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities. After conservation (right), the details of the handkerchief in his right hand and the figures and trees in the right background were noticeably enhanced.

The Society used de Beaumont's survey as support material when it applied for and received a series of conservation grants from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities (MCAH). The seven grants provided seed money that, matched by the Society, was dedicated to the restoration of the portrait collection. In all, thirty-three portraits were conserved with MCAH support between 1969 and 1975. Many canvases were professionally cleaned for the first time, old fills were replaced, and necessary repairs were made (fig. 8).³⁰ The Society continued to collaborate with the state agency and in 1991 consulted with a conservator, who assessed the condition of the Society's miniatures in preparation for another granting cycle.³¹ These objects, which had largely been ignored in previous conservation efforts, are among the Society's most fragile works of art. The subsequent treatment of twenty-eight miniatures was again funded in part by the MCAH. Many

30. This work was performed by the conservator Morton C. Bradley of Arlington, Massachusetts. Files on the grant process and lists of the works that were treated are preserved in the AAS Archives.

31. See Carol Aiken, 'Portrait Miniature Survey: The American Antiquarian Society,' February 1991, AAS Archives. Aiken, of Baltimore, Maryland, completed the treatments in 1993.

of the illustrations in the current publication are the first reproductions of Society portraits since their conservation with the help of MCAH funds.

The use of the Worcester Art Museum as a source for information on the latest conservation techniques was in keeping with the Society's long relationship with the museum and the city of Worcester in general. Isaiah Thomas selected Worcester, his home since 1775, as the site for the Society because of its inland position, relatively safe from such threats as invading armies, large urban fires, and coastal flooding. Many early members of the Society belonged to Worcester's elite class, and an examination of the portrait collection, with its likenesses of regional politicians, local industrialists, and clerical leaders, helps to illuminate the city's history. Many leaders of the American Antiquarian Society were also major Worcester philanthropists, who provided resources for the establishment of colleges, churches, and hospitals in the area. In the nineteenth century the leadership of the Salisbury family, a wealthy and influential power in Worcester during the industrial age, connected the Society to most of the large institutions in the region, including the Worcester Art Museum, which was founded by Stephen Salisbury III in 1896 while he was serving as president of the Society.

Not unexpectedly, associations with the Worcester Art Museum had a direct effect on the Society's portrait collection and a collegial relationship quickly developed between the two institutions. With limited hanging space at the Society, some especially rare portraits, such as the c. 1690 image of Maria Catherine Smith (cat. 104), were sent to the art museum on long-term loan. Over the years, AAS has participated in many special exhibitions at the art museum. The professional staff at the museum, trained in the registration techniques and packing particularities of the art world, also processed dozens of loans on behalf of the Society, building crates, recording deliveries, and overseeing the shipment of most of the Society's fine art loans from 1940 to the 1970s. Louisa Dresser Campbell (1907-89), a curator at the Worcester Art Museum, unofficially championed the American Antiquarian Society's portrait collection, informing her colleagues about the collection's masterworks and organizing exhibitions that featured portraits from the Society. A 1969 article by Dresser in *The Magazine Antiques* was the first

publication about the Society's portrait collection to reach a large national audience.³² In return for such exceptional support and promotion, the American Antiquarian Society elected Dresser to membership in 1964, as only the third woman to be so honored.³³

Nearly thirty years after Dresser's *Antiques* article and more than fifty years since the production of Frederick Lewis Weis's checklist, the American Antiquarian Society is again publishing its portrait holdings. The current volume, made possible in part by the financial support of Society member Charles Beach Barlow and the Gladys Richards Foundation, is the first to fully illustrate the collection and to include relevant information on the artists as well as the sitters. The great strengths of the Society's portrait collection are revealed in the pages that follow. The collection contains a number of exceptional images, including eighteenth-century works, artists' self-portraits, and portraits closely related to the production of prints in America. Nearly forty eighteenth-century portraits are in the collection, mostly of prominent clergymen such as Thomas Prince (cat. 97), the minister of Boston's Old South Church from 1718 to 1758, and John Singleton Copley's c. 1765 portrait of Mather Byles, Sr. (cat. 22). Eighteenth-century America was not solely populated with ministers, however, and the Society's collection also features early portraits of the surveyor Theophilus Chandler (cat. 25) and the New York cattle dealer John Bush (cats. 17, 19). The Society owns two portraits of Bush, one painted by the artist Matthew Pratt in 1785 (cat. 17) and a second completed in 1791 by a non-academic painter who signed himself M'Kay and MacKay (cat. 19). The existence of these two very different portraits, commissioned by the same man, suggests the fluctuating attitudes of taste and the complexities of art patronage in eighteenth-century America.

Remarkably, the Society's portrait collection contains four self-portraits by American painters, including the eighteenth-century likeness of Winthrop Chandler (cat. 27), and portraits of Mather Brown (cat. 14), Bass Otis (cat. 91), and the regional painter William Willard (cat. 152). These images capture on canvas the physical aspects of four very

32. Dresser, 1969, 717-27.

33. Georgia Brady Barnhill, 'Louisa Dresser Campbell,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 99 (October 1989): 333-35.

different painters. Chandler spent most of his life in central New England, painting family members and neighbors and trying unsuccessfully to stay out of debt. Brown studied in London and painted portraits of European princes and American patriots. Otis, like Chandler, was largely self-taught. He settled in Philadelphia and experimented with lithography while earning a living as a portrait painter and art instructor. Willard, who studied art in Boston, is most remembered for his likenesses of famous Massachusetts politicians such as Daniel Webster (cat. 142) and Charles Sumner (cat. 115). Each of the four artists depicted himself in a dark coat and carefully tied cravat, set against a neutral background, with light softly sculpting the contours of his face. None holds the tools of his trade, although Otis's spectacles are perched precariously on the top of his head. Each appears much as his own patrons might, well-dressed and proudly engaging the viewer with a clear and direct gaze.

Several works in the Society's portrait collection are specifically related to early American published prints, revealing the close tie between painted portraits and printed imagery in the early days of portrait making. The Society's seventeenth-century portrait of Richard Mather (cat. 82) may have inspired the Boston printer John Foster (1648–81) to produce the nation's first portrait in woodcut around 1670. Over fifty years later, Peter Pelham's painted portrait of Cotton Mather (cat. 78) served as the basis for the first mezzotint published in America, also by Pelham. In addition, the American Antiquarian Society Graphic Arts Collection contains not only the c. 1732 engraving of Mather Byles, Sr., after the Society's painted portrait by Pelham (cat. 21), but also the copper plate used to create the print. Because of the Society's dedication to collecting both painted and printed imagery, these unique associations between media have been preserved.

Unquestionably, the greatest strength of the Society's portrait collection is the documentation of the portraits and the sitters in the Society's library and manuscript collections. The portrait collection is inexorably linked to the Society's holdings of original correspondence, early imprints, newspapers, and nineteenth-century books. Journals kept by sitters relate portrait sittings and personal expectations of the portrait-making process. Receipts and letters from commissioned artists outline

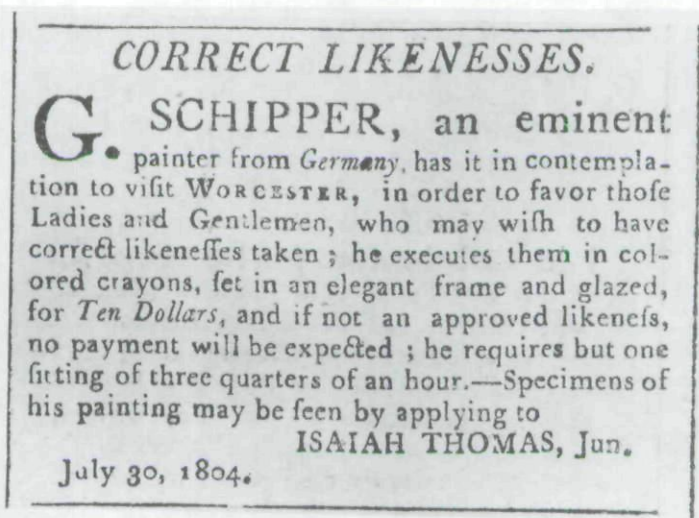


Fig. 9. Gerrit Schipper uses past customer Isaiah Thomas, Jr., as a reference in this advertisement placed in several different issues of the *Worcester Spy* during July and August 1804.

payment structures and details of patronage that are rarely found in other collections. Early newspapers contain many artists' advertisements (fig. 9), published obituaries of hard-to-identify sitters, and commentary on the times in which these images were created. Information on sitters and their achievements can be gleaned from original letters, unpublished writings, and early printed texts, such as composer Timothy Swan's (cat. 118) *Songster's Assistant*, the first extant compilation of secular music with musical notation printed in America (fig. 10). The portrait collection contains over thirty images of authors—from clergymen who published their sermons to poets from the Midwest who described the nation's landscape. These images reflect the Society's dedication to the preservation of the history of the book in America, a programming priority established during the 1980s. Along with these authors and the numerous likenesses of Isaiah Thomas, who was keenly interested in the history of printing, the collection also includes images of book and almanac publishers, booksellers, newspaper editors, illustrators, a typesetter, and several renowned book collectors. In addition, thirty of the portraits, ranging in date from the seventeenth to the

twentieth century, either depict the sitter holding a book or feature books in the composition. Examined in this context, the portraits supply pictorial evidence about the importance of reading, scholarship, and the written word in American history.

Today, the American Antiquarian Society's portrait collection continues to grow, albeit slowly and deliberately. Currently, the primary role of the collection, as perceived by most members, is to memorialize former Society leaders, a view that was stressed at the 1996 dedication of one of the Society's recent portrait acquisitions, a likeness of President Emeritus Marcus A. McCorison (cat. 76). President Ellen S. Dunlap referred to the Society's portraits then as reminders of the institution's overarching task of preserving American history, saying: 'The sense of community here at AAS transcends and bridges the generations. Those of us on staff today follow in the inimitable footsteps of our predecessors. . . . Our mission is the same as theirs was—to collect, to preserve, to catalogue, and to share our nation's history—and we make progress by building upon their accomplishments. Their portraits watch over our work and their legacies inspire us.'³⁴ The American Antiquarian Society's likenesses of its leaders and of America's ministers, politicians, authors, artists, cattle dealers, and hat makers add a fascinating and enduring facet to the institution's unsurpassed holdings of Americana, a facet that fulfills the Society's stated mission to 'improve and instruct posterity' in ways that uniquely deepen our understanding of life in the United States before 1877.

34. Ellen S. Dunlap, 'Report of the Council,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 106 (October 1996): 208–9.

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