

Further Notes on John Watson

BY JOHN HILL MORGAN

IN OCTOBER, 1940, the author of these notes addressed the American Antiquarian Society on the subject of "John Watson, Painter, Merchant and Capitalist of New Jersey—1685–1768," and his paper duly appeared in its *Proceedings* for that year.¹ The search for Watson material had covered a long period and while the results as to his painting in oil were meager—only two having been found which were surely from his brush—and the number now known of his small portraits in plumbago or with wash added is much smaller than the list published by Benson J. Lossing as before him in 1872. Indeed, none of the thirty-three enumerated by him can now be located unless the self-portrait of John Watson, which was among those loaned to him by William A. Whitehead, is that now owned by Hall Park McCullough.

Mr. Lossing listed a few only of these Watson drawings as, in speaking of the self-portraits, he wrote that

on the table upon which this notice of him is written are no less than nine India ink and pencil sketches, of large miniature size, showing those changes [in Watson], while his years were increasing from twenty-seven to over sixty. They constitute part of a large collection of such pictures with originals and copies in different stages of finish, and of varied excellence as to execution . . . [which] leads to the enumeration of some of them here.²

¹ *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 50, pp. 225–317. Reprinted separately, 1941. One piece of supplementary information has come to hand: The *New York Mercury* for January 21, 1765, p. 4, column 3, contains an advertisement headed "To be Sold, at public Vendue, On Friday the first Day of February next, on the Premises, three small Tenements, on Lot No. 84. (being part of the Grounds belonging to the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, of this City,) situate in John-Street, and Corner of Dutch-Street . . . now in the Possession of Mr. John Watson, Painter, and others. . . ."

² *American Historical Record*, vol. 1, p. 465.

Mr. Lossing lists the names of thirty-three subjects saying that they formed part of "a large collection" then before him. How many would be "a large collection" of which thirty-three were a part? Possibly one hundred?³

Miss Margaret Van Cortlandt Whitehead informed the writer that after the death of her grandfather, William A. Whitehead, author of *The Early History of Perth Amboy*, the source material for his book, his small Watson portraits, notes, and the like, were stored in a warehouse, she believes, in Norwalk, Connecticut. Later, her father, Bishop Cortlandt Whitehead, received word that this warehouse had been partially burned and much of the contents looted. It is probable, therefore, that no one of the thirty-three drawings enumerated by Lossing or the "large collection" of others which were before him have survived.

An inquiry addressed to Miss Whitehead brought the information that her grandfather's annotated copy of *The Early History of Perth Amboy* was still owned by her and her sister. This contained over two hundred pages of notes and corrections, and bound in the book were six Watson drawings in plumbago and wash. This volume was purchased by the writer and, after the removal of the portrait drawings, was presented, together with the Watson drawing of William Eier, to the New Jersey Historical Society, of Newark, to whose members Mr. Whitehead had dedicated his book. Six drawings pasted on extra pages had been inserted at the appropriate place in the text with the names inscribed thereon either by Watson himself or Mr. Whitehead.

The portrait drawings of Sophia Watson and David Lyell, the silversmith, have been presented to the Yale University Art Gallery, that of Thomas Gordon to the Museum of the City of New York, and that of Colonel Gabriel Stelle to the American Antiquarian Society. The plumbago drawing of

³ See Morgan, *John Watson* (reprint, 1941), p. 77.

Miles Forster has been retained by the author for further study.

The following continues the writer's numbering under sub-division D, "Portrait Drawings in Pencil and Wash," pp. 78-92 of his former publication, *John Watson, Painter, Merchant and Capitalist of New Jersey 1685-1768*. Wherever a note or correction by William A. Whitehead is mentioned it is to be found in his copy of *The Early History of Perth Amboy* now in the New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, New Jersey.

No. 27 MRS. LEWIS MORRIS ASHFIELD
(ELIZABETH REDFORD)

SUBJECT: Elizabeth Redford was born probably at Shrewsbury, Monmouth County, New Jersey, September 14, 1729, the daughter of Colonel John and Lydia Redford. She was married at Christ Episcopal Church, Shrewsbury, February 4, 1748, to Lewis Morris Ashfield, a son of Richard Ashfield and Isabella Morris and a grandson of Governor Lewis Morris. Mrs. Ashfield died November 30, 1762, and lies buried in the cemetery of Christ Church, Shrewsbury.

INSCRIBED: On back in John Watson's handwriting: "Mrs Ashfield / taken from the Life— / by her Freind Mr Jno. Watson"

SIZE: $3\frac{5}{8} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$.

MEDIUM: Pencil (plumbago) on vellum. Here and there touched with wash.

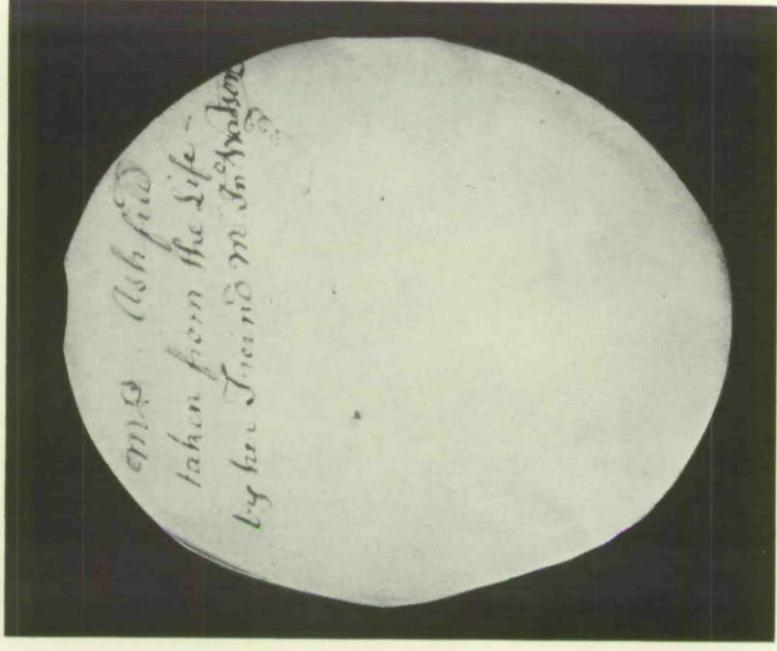
ARTIST: John Watson.

OWNERSHIP: Descended to Euphemia Ashfield, daughter of Lewis Morris and Elizabeth Redford Ashfield. She married George D. Brinkerhoff; to their daughter Euphemia, who married Dr. Stephen Fairchild; to their son Richard Van Wyck Fairchild, who married Ruth E. Tichenor, who presented the drawing to the New Jersey Historical Society prior to October, 1915.

REMARKS: It is not possible to determine of what stones the brooch and shoulder clip are composed as the drawing is without



No. 27. MRS. LEWIS MORRIS ASHFIELD



No. 27a. REVERSE OF No. 27

color, but each has as a pendant a large pearl drop. It is probable that the pearls were added by the artist as decoration and may not actually have been worn.

Considering the portrait of Mrs. Ashfield from the spectator's point of view the light comes from the left and, therefore, the left side of the nose should not be in shadow. This mannerism of placing a shadow on the side of the nose facing the light appears also in the portraits of Lyell and Stelle, and to a lesser degree in that of Eier.

NOTE: The Watson drawing of Mrs. Ashfield has lain unattributed in the files of the New Jersey Historical Society since its gift some time prior to 1915. A year or so ago it was recognized as by John Watson by Francis W. Bilodeau while examining some material there. He had intended to write an article upon the subject but his induction into the armed forces of the United States prevented this. He is now Staff Sergeant of Co. "C," 12th Eng. Battalion, stationed at Nashville, Tennessee. My grateful thanks are due to him for his courtesy in permitting me to include his discovery in this article.

No. 28 WILLIAM EIER

SUBJECT: The birth date of William Eier and when he came to the Colonies is uncertain but he was the first mayor of Amboy, 1721-1723.

INSCRIBED: On front: "Wm. Eier / —First Mayor of Amboy— / 1721-1723." This inscription is in Whitehead's handwriting.

SIZE: $3\frac{7}{8}$ x $2\frac{7}{8}$.

MEDIUM: Pencil (plumbago) and wash on vellum.

ARTIST: John Watson.

OWNERSHIP: This drawing belonged to W. A. Whitehead and was interleaved between pp. 52 and 53 of the annotated copy of his book. The volume descended to his granddaughters, the Misses Margaret Van Cortlandt Whitehead and Penelope Parker Whitehead, and contained six original Watson drawings. Purchased in February, 1942, by Mr. John Hill Morgan, the book,

together with the portrait drawing of Eier, was presented to the New Jersey Historical Society.

REMARKS: Governor Robert Hunter granted a charter to Perth Amboy on August 24, 1718, and in the preamble William Eier is mentioned. On July 30, 1718, the Church of England congregation in Amboy was established and William Eier appointed a Warden thereof.⁴ Mr. Eier's "houses and lands near the middle of the town of Woodbridge" were advertised for sale in 1732. He was then dead.

NOTE: It would seem that this drawing remained in Watson's possession for some reason and was acquired by Mr. Whitehead along with a large number of others. He does not state when, where, or from whom he obtained them, but from the facts available it is the belief of the writer that when he was collecting material for his book *The Early History of Perth Amboy*, he came upon these remains of Watson's activities as an artist; that in turn he loaned many to Lossing, and that they constituted a "part of a large collection of such pictures with originals and copies in different states of finish, and of varied excellence as to execution" described in the article by Benson J. Lossing called "The First Painter in America."⁵

No. 29 MILES FORSTER

SUBJECT: The name of Miles Forster first appears in the Provincial Records in 1684 as deputy to William Haige, the Receiver and Surveyor-General. Governor Dongan appointed him Collector and Receiver of the Customs in 1687. From 1689 to 1695 he lived in New York where he was a merchant. He was an executor of the will of Governor Lewis Morris in 1690 and resided in Amboy for many years before his death in 1710. Forster married Rebecca, daughter of Gawen Lawrie, deputy-governor of the province; and William Bradford, the New York printer, was one of his executors.

⁴ Whitehead, p. 217.

⁵ *American Historical Record*, vol. 1, p. 465.



No. 29. MILES FORSTER



No. 28. WILLIAM EIER

INSCRIBED: No.

SIZE: 2 x 1 $\frac{1}{8}$.

MEDIUM: Pencil (plumbago) on vellum.

ARTIST: Copy by John Watson (?).

OWNERSHIP: Same as that under William Eier, No. 28, into the ownership of W. A. Whitehead. Interleaved between pp. 46 and 47 of Mr. Whitehead's annotated copy of *The Early History of Perth Amboy*. Purchased from his granddaughters by the present owner, Mr. John Hill Morgan.

NOTES: There are further annotations by Mr. Whitehead in his personal copy of *The Early History*, p. 46, as follows:

He was a Quaker. N.Y. Eng. MSS p. 208.

*He carried on mercantile business also in Amboy, 1701-1705.

†They were married the latter part of ~~1787~~ 1687 [pencil change. See letter from Mr. Vail fronting page 45; also Mr. Whitehead's written note p. 46.]

*1 At the time of his death he was Collector and Receiver General of the Province appointed March 31, 1709, succeeding Peter Fancounier. Forster was succeeded by Thos. Gordon who was commissioned July 16, 1711. Forster's commission ran thus: "to have and enjoy the office in as large and ample manner as our late Receiver General Peter Fancounier." Liber AAA of Commissioners page 100.

Among those who attended the earlier meetings of the Quakers at Amboy were . . . Miles Forster. [letter facing p. 45.]

Whitehead says that Forster died in 1710. Watson was in New Jersey some time before June of 1714,⁶ but how much before has not been determined. As the costume in which Forster is drawn was common in the last quarter of the Seventeenth Century, it is suggested that Watson copied an early portrait of Forster—perhaps a miniature. This seems more plausible than that Forster should continue to wear a costume so long out of fashion, or that John Watson was in New Jersey before 1700.

REMARKS: This plumbago drawing was among those owned by W. A. Whitehead and purchased by the writer. Mr. Whitehead's note thereon is as follows:

A rude miniature likeness of Mr. Forster is in my possession, and one of his daughter Mary was lost recently, on its way to me, after enduring

⁶ See J. H. Morgan, *John Watson*, pp. 17-8, for an account of his law suit against Turnbull.

through the changes and chances of several generations, and outlasting herself and all her kindred.

No. 30 THOMAS GORDON

SUBJECT: Thomas Gordon emigrated from Pitlochrie, Scotland, to the Colony of New Jersey in October, 1684, and bought a farm on Cedar Brook, near Scotch Plains, about ten miles west of Amboy.

He held many provincial offices including that of Deputy Secretary and Register for the Proprietors, Customs Officer, Judge of Probate, and represented Amboy and Middlesex County in the Provincial Assembly from 1703 to 1709 of which he was at one time Speaker.

Opposing Lord Cornbury he was arrested by virtue of one of his Lordship's own warrants but admitted to bail of £2,000 for his appearance in October, 1705. Lord Cornbury's successor, Lord Lovelace, reinstated Gordon in the courts in December, 1708, and he was later appointed one of the Council under Governor Hunter and was reappointed by Governor William Burnet.

SIZE: $3\frac{3}{8}$ x $2\frac{1}{8}$.

MEDIUM: Pencil (plumbago) and wash on vellum.

ARTIST: John Watson.

OWNERSHIP: Same as that under William Eier, No. 28, into the ownership of W. A. Whitehead. Interleaved between pp. 64 and 65 of Mr. Whitehead's annotated copy of *The Early History of Perth Amboy*. Purchased from his granddaughters by the writer and presented to the Museum of the City of New York in December of 1942.

REMARKS: A note in Mr. Whitehead's handwriting on p. 61 giving the name of Mr. L. C. Hamersley, a descendant, as his informant states that Thomas Gordon was personally known to James II. A note in Mr. Whitehead's handwriting appearing at



No. 30. THOMAS GORDON



No. 31. DAVID LYELL

p. 65 in his personal copy of *The Early History* states that, "His [Gordon's] Commission was dated July 16, 1711. (E. J. Records, AAA, p. 133.) He succeeded Miles Forster who died in 1710, and seems to have been in the discharge of the duties of the office from 23d June of that year."

He was a Vestryman of St. Peter's Church from 1718 to 1722. In 1825 a tablet was erected expressing the gratitude of the church to him.⁷ He was appointed Attorney-general of the Province by Governor Hunter in March of 1715,⁸ in place of Alexander Griffith, removed.

There are a few other unimportant notes by Mr. Whitehead.

No. 31 DAVID LYELL

SUBJECT: David Lyell, a goldsmith by trade, of St.-Martins-in-the-fields, London, became a proprietor of New Jersey in April, 1697, by the purchase of a forty-eighth part from Andrew Hamilton. He lived in New York during the years 1701-1703 but in Amboy for most of his life here, and in Monmouth County at the time of his death. His home was on the shore of the harbor near the Episcopal Church; he was a member of the Council, 1719-1723, under Governor William Burnett, and died in 1726.

INSCRIBED: On back in John Watson's handwriting: "Mr. Lyell."

SIZE: $3\frac{3}{8}$ x $2\frac{1}{2}$.

OWNERSHIP: Same as that under William Eier, No. 28, into the ownership of W. A. Whitehead. Interleaved between pp. 84 and 85 of Mr. Whitehead's annotated copy of *The Early History of Perth Amboy*. Purchased from his granddaughters by the writer and presented to the Yale University Art Gallery in October of 1942.

REMARKS: A correction noted by Whitehead states that Mrs. Lyell's name was Catherine and not Sarah.

⁷ Whitehead, pp. 218-9.

⁸ *New Jersey Archives*, ser. 1, vol. 4, p. 209.

No. 32 COLONEL GABRIEL STELLE

SUBJECT: Gabriel Stelle, son of Poncet and Eugenie (Legereau) Stelle, was born probably in New York in February, 1683. His parents were French Huguenots who came to America about 1682. He bought land in Shrewsbury and other places and became a wealthy and influential citizen. His third wife was a daughter of Thomas Gordon. In 1728 he received a patent for a ferry from South Amboy to Staten Island, touching at Perth. He died in 1738.

INSCRIBED: On front under drawing in Whitehead's handwriting: "Colonel Stelle." On the back in Watson's handwriting: "Coll. Stelle."

SIZE: $3\frac{1}{8} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$.

MEDIUM: Pencil (plumbago) and wash on vellum.

ARTIST: John Watson.

OWNERSHIP: Same as that under William Eier, No. 28, into the ownership of W. A. Whitehead. Interleaved between pp. 272 and 273 of Mr. Whitehead's annotated copy of *The Early History of Perth Amboy*. Purchased from his granddaughters by the writer and presented to the American Antiquarian Society in October of 1942.

No. 33 SOPHIA WATSON

SUBJECT: Sophia Watson was born in Scotland, a niece of the painter, and married first, Dr. John Waterhouse who lies buried in the graveyard of St. Peter's Church, Amboy, and secondly, John Terrill of New York.

She died September 7, 1809, and also lies in St. Peter's Churchyard. Her tombstone states that she was 75 years old, which would indicate her birth in 1734. This then would correct the statement made in the writer's former publication (p. 20) that Sophia Watson came with the painter on his return from Scotland in 1730. It follows that Watson probably painted her in 1751 which may also be the year in which he returned from Scotland.



No. 32. COLONEL GABRIEL STELLE



No. 33. SOPHIA WATSON

INSCRIBED: On front in Whitehead's handwriting: "Sophia Watson / Aged 17." On back in Watson's handwriting: "AE. T. 17 / Sophia Watson / Amboye."

SIZE: $3\frac{3}{4}$ x $2\frac{1}{8}$.

MEDIUM: Pencil (plumbago) on vellum with light touches of wash under eye balls, nostrils, et cet.

ARTIST: John Watson.

OWNERSHIP: Same as that under William Eier, No. 28, into the ownership of W. A. Whitehead. Interleaved between pp. 126 and 127 of Mr. Whitehead's annotated copy of *The Early History of Perth Amboy*. Purchased from his granddaughters by the writer and presented to the Yale University Art Gallery in October of 1942.

NOTE: Apparently the small plumbago and wash portraits by John Watson passed at his death to his niece Sophia Watson Terrill and from her to her daughter Sophia Waterhouse Brown, and many came into the hands of William A. Whitehead.

The possibility that this portrait may be of the second Sophia Watson referred to in the writer's former publication at p. 60 is suggested.

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.