

James Sullivan (1744-1808), c. 1807

John Christian Rauschner (1760-after 1830)

colored wax

2 3/8 (h) (6.03)

Bequest of William Bentley, 1819

Weis 109

Hewes Number: 114

Ex. Coll.: Given to the donor in 1808.

James Sullivan studied law and practiced in Maine and Massachusetts before the American Revolution. He became a justice of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts during the war and helped establish a code of law for the state after independence. In 1783 Sullivan was elected to Congress, where he served one term. He remained in government for the rest of his life and continued to maintain a large law practice in Boston. In 1790 he was appointed attorney general of Massachusetts, a post he retained until he ran successfully for governor in 1807.

Sullivan was interested in the history of the young nation and especially Massachusetts. He was a founder and the first president of the Massachusetts Historical Society, established in 1791. Sullivan was keenly interested in American legal history, and published his first book, Observations Upon the Government of the United States, in 1791. His major work, The History of the District of Maine, was published in 1795, and was followed by a number of essays, articles, and books that focused on the legal and historical development of the New England states, among them History of Land Titles in Massachusetts (1801). Many of Sullivan's publications and writings are preserved in the imprint collection of the American Antiquarian Society.¹

This wax profile portrait of Sullivan was made just after he was elected governor of Massachusetts. It was molded by John Christian Rauschner, a native of Frankfurt, Germany, and son of a plaster modeler and stucco worker.² When Rauschner arrived in New York City in 1799, he was skilled in the production of lifelike miniature profiles in wax, a popular European method of portraiture that found a ready market in America. He travelled along the eastern seaboard in search of commissions, visiting Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Delaware,

Maryland, and Virginia. He evidently was successful in finding patrons, as more than one hundred wax profiles by him have been identified.³

Rauschner was in Boston when he produced Sullivan's miniature. In an advertisement in the Independent Chronicle on June 8, 1807 (fig. 29), he stated: 'Portrait of His Excellency Governor Sullivan. The Subscriber, having been favored to take a Correct Likeness of Governor Sullivan, purposes to finish a certain number of his Excellency's Portraits by Subscription-- which is now open at his Office, in Winter-street, and will be closed within a few days. The Price to Subscribers will be Two Dollars less, than his usual price.'⁴ Because Rauschner used molds, he was able to make multiple likenesses of his more popular sitters. The governor's death in December 1808 may have helped to increase Rauschner's business; eight replicas of the Sullivan image are known.⁵ The Salem, Massachusetts, minister William Bentley (cat. 8) was given this copy of the wax portrait shortly after Sullivan's funeral.⁶

¹ For more on Sullivan, see Thomas C. Armory, The Life of Sullivan (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co., 1852), and John Francis Sprague, Three Men from Maine (Dover, Me.: published by the author, 1924).

² The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America, 1564-1860, s.v. 'Rauschner, John Christian.' In 1891 AAS sought to identify the artist of this Sullivan portrait, and by 1897 the attribution to Rauschner had been made. (See Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 7 [October 1891]: 357, and 11 [April 1897]: 309-10.)

³ Ethel Stanwood Bolton, American Wax Portraits (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), 24-25.

⁴ Independent Chronicle, June 8, 1807.

⁵ Wayne Craven, Sculpture in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1968), 29. Two of the Sullivan replicas are in public collections in Boston, those of the State House and the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. Five replicas were owned privately in 1946. (See Frederick Weis, 'Portraits in the American Antiquarian Society,' Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 56 [April 1946]: 104-5.)

⁶ William Bentley Diary, December 24, 1808, William Bentley Papers, 1666-1819, AAS Manuscript Collection. Bentley wrote: 'We have been favored with a wax profile of Sullivan in high relief. Much has been said of the resemblance and execution.' On December 16, 1808, Bentley gave a description of Sullivan's funeral, which included 1,100 mourners, several area clergymen, and a regiment of mounted cavalry.