

Notes on the Thomas Family Portraits

BY CLARENCE S. BRIGHAM

A NOTABLE gift has been received from Mrs. William Sloane, of New York, a direct descendant from Isaiah Thomas. She has presented to the Society the miniature of Isaiah Thomas painted by W. M. S. Doyle, and pastel portraits of Isaiah Thomas and his second wife.

The subject of the Thomas family portraits is confusing, as the wealthy patron of letters and founder of this Society had many portraits made of himself and the various members of his family. In his final will, drawn in 1820, he made the following references to pictures:

I give to my Grandson Isaiah Thomas the large crayon Picture of myself, together with the small crayon Picture of his deceased Grandmother.

I give to Isaiah Thomas Soper, son of my adopted Daughter, the late Elizabeth Mary Soper (formerly Elizabeth Mary Thomas) the crayon Picture of his late Mother.

To my Granddaughter Mary Rebecca I have already given a Miniature, Picture.

To my Granddaughter Frances Church Thomas, Daughter of my Son, I give two crayon Pictures, the one of her Father, the other of her Mother.

To my Granddaughter Augusta, the Daughter of my Son, I give a Miniature Picture of myself, which Picture is set in a Gold frame and has plaited hair at the back of it.

To my Granddaughter Caroline, the Daughter of my Son, I give another Miniature Picture of myself (a crayon).

To my Granddaughter Hannah, the Daughter of my Son, I give the crayon Picture of her Aunt, Miss Hannah Weld, together with a profile framed and a print of myself. I also give to my said Granddaughter

Augusta a small profile, framed, of her late Aunt, Mrs. MacCulloch, my Sister.

To my Grandson Isaiah Thomas Simmons I give another crayon Picture of myself, a small one, but yet drawn on a larger scale than that given to Caroline.

I give to said Society [the American Antiquarian Society] a Portrait of myself lately done by Mr. Greenwood of Boston.

I give to my Granddaughter, Valeria Williams, a Miniature Picture of her Mother (which her Mother gave to me), it is in a small round frame.

I give to Elizabeth C. Simmons, my Granddaughter, a crayon Miniature of her Mother, now with the Miniature family Pictures in my Parlour.

I bequeath to my Granddaughter Elizabeth C. Simmons a Miniature Picture of myself, set in Gold, which picture is now in a small wooden oval box in the sideboard standing in the parlour and in the same box is the other Miniature picture bequeathed to my Granddaughter Caroline. These bequests, if given before my decease, will of course be void.

Dr. Charles L. Nichols in 1920 wrote for the Society a paper on "The Portraits of Isaiah Thomas, with a Genealogy of his Descendants." Since that time, twenty-five years ago, many of the portraits discussed have undergone changes of ownership. Among the additions and corrections to Dr. Nichols's articles are the following:

The copy of the Greenwood portrait of Isaiah Thomas which was owned by Leicester Academy is identified by the following entry in the Antiquarian Society's manuscript Librarian's Journal of 1853-1854, under date of December 10, 1853: "Mr. Billings, an artist, engaged in taking a copy of the portrait of Isaiah Thomas, for Leicester Academy." This was Edwin T. Billings, prominent as a portrait painter in Worcester County at that time.

The miniature of Isaiah Thomas presented to the Society by Mrs. Sloane was painted by W. M. S. Doyle and is no. 9 in Dr. Nichols's list. Mrs. Sloane purchased this miniature about 1914 from Otto Wiecker, a Boston dealer, who had obtained it from the Misses Randall, daughters of Elizabeth C. (Simmons) Randall, Isaiah's granddaughter. The

miniature was out of its frame, so Mrs. Sloane had a new oval gold frame made for it. It is this portrait that was engraved, during Thomas's lifetime, for the *Freemason's Magazine* for November, 1811, vol. 2, p. 81. The two pastels of Isaiah Thomas and his wife also came from the Misses Randall and were purchased by Mrs. Sloane from the Boston dealer, F. W. Bayley, who had bought them from Francis H. Bigelow. Mr. Bigelow wrote Dr. Nichols September 18, 1920, that the two pastels were presumably made in 1804, as they were accompanied by a pastel of Isaiah Thomas's daughter, Mary, by the same artist, and dated 1804 on the back. This was presumably the "crayon Miniature of her mother" bequeathed by Isaiah to Elizabeth C. Simmons, but is now untraced. All of these pastels were undoubtedly made by W. M. S. Doyle, and inherited from Miss Randall's uncle, Isaiah Thomas Simmons, and her mother Elizabeth C. Simmons.

The framed miniature of Isaiah Thomas which Isaac R. Thomas recently gave to the Society came from the Misses Randall, through Mr. Wiecker, in 1914. This is in its original frame and was undoubtedly painted by Doyle.

Four Thomas family crayon portraits have come up for sale during the past year—1. Isaiah Thomas, Jr., with an inscription on the back, in the handwriting of Benjamin F. Thomas. "Supposed to be Isaiah Thomas, Jr., father of Isaiah, William, Edward, Benj. Franklin, & many daughters. Died about 1819, when B. F. T. was 6 yrs. old." 2. His mother, Mary, with an inscription on the back in the hand of Isaiah Thomas: "Mary Thomas, wife of Isaiah Thomas, Esq. of Worcester. Taken 1804. Aged 58 at that time. Died Nov. 16, 1818, aged 67 years & 5 months. Per Isaiah Thomas." 3. His wife, Mary, with an inscription in the hand of Benjamin F. Thomas: "Supposed to be Mrs. Mary Thomas, wife of Isaiah Thomas, Jr. Polly Weld as maiden.

Mother of Isaiah, William, Edward, Benj. Franklin, & many daughters. Died about 1824, when B. F. T. was 11 years old."

4. His sister-in-law, with inscription in hand of Isaiah Thomas: "Miss Hannah Weld. Taken in 1804 and at that time 42 years of age."

These four pastels were undoubtedly by Doyle. In a volume of receipted bills, 1802-1819, in the Isaiah Thomas Papers, are two receipts, both signed by Wm. M. S. Doyle, one dated July 19, 1805, for \$35.00 "on account of miniatures," and the other dated Nov. 10, 1805, for \$25.00 "in part payment for Miniatures amounting to Fifty Dollars." Miniatures evidently meant pastels—Thomas, in his will, twice speaks of "a crayon Miniature." Doyle made several of these pastels for Thomas in 1804, and they certainly could not all have been miniatures in oil.

The four pastels were purchased in 1944 from the estate of Mrs. George R. Minot by the Colonial Antique Shop (Maurice Rubin) of Boston. At the present time three have not been sold, Mr. Rubin retaining the Mrs. Isaiah Thomas, Jr., and a New York dealer holding on consignment the Mrs. Isaiah Thomas and the Isaiah Thomas, Jr. The Hannah Weld was acquired by Chauncey C. Nash of Boston.

Four miniatures in oil have also come upon the market this past year. These were owned by Mrs. George R. Minot and were inherited by her from her grandfather, Benjamin F. Thomas, who was Isaiah's grandson. They comprise two portraits of Isaiah Thomas, nos. 11 and 12 in Dr. Nichols's list—one, by an unknown artist, representing Thomas as a young man, and the other painted by Sarah Goodridge. The latter may possibly be the portrait which Thomas refers to in his Diary when he records, under Nov. 25 and 27, 1805, "sit for miniature." The other two are of Isaiah Thomas, Jr., on ivory, and of Benjamin F. Thomas, also on ivory.

Upon Mrs. Minot's recent death, the miniatures descended to Francis Minot, of New York, who through an agent sold them to the Worcester Art Museum. An article on the acquisition of the miniatures, with illustrations, was printed in the Art Museum Bulletin for April, 1946.

The Art Museum also has a framed pastel portrait, size 7 by 5¼ inches, of Mrs. Mary Thomas, wife of Isaiah Thomas, Jr., taken in 1804, bequeathed in 1945 by Miss Eliza Sturgis Paine, great granddaughter of Isaiah Thomas, Jr.

The miniature of Isaiah Thomas which he bequeathed to his granddaughter Augusta, and which was described as "set in a Gold frame and has plaited hair at the back of it," was untraced by Dr. Nichols, but has since been found to be owned by William G. Taussig of Boston, a direct descendant of Isaiah Thomas.

The crayon portrait of Isaiah Thomas which descended to Leonard C. Couch of Taunton, and which was presented to the American Antiquarian Society by Mr. Couch and Dr. Nichols, was credited by Dr. Nichols, on the strength of the opinion of two experts, to the well-known artist, James Sharples, and was so reproduced as the frontispiece of the Nichols pamphlet. But as it was executed in 1804 and Sharples was in England in 1801-1809, and as it does not resemble Sharples's work, it can now be identified as another of the pastels by W. M. S. Doyle. It is identical with the work of Doyle, as shown in his several other Thomas family portraits.

The best known of the large Isaiah Thomas portraits is that painted by Ethan Allen Greenwood in 1818 and it is the one which he bequeathed to the Antiquarian Society. In a manuscript volume of receipted bills, 1802-1819, in the Thomas Papers, is the receipt signed by the artist Feb. 27, 1819, for \$55.00 for painting this portrait; the receipt reads "Price of Picture and frame is \$60.00."

Greenwood's portrait of Isaiah Thomas, Jr., painted in 1818, was donated to the Antiquarian Society in 1945 by Agnes A., Mary P., and Frank P. Abbott, descendants in the sixth generation from Isaiah Thomas.

Some new light has accordingly been thrown on the Thomas family portraits, a subject which is confusing because there are so many portraits, miniatures and crayon pastels to be accounted for. Probably others, not now located, will turn up in the future. The Antiquarian Society now has a fair sampling of these pictures, although not being an art museum, it cannot expect to acquire more than a few examples of the many portraits of the family of its founder.

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