

HANNAH ADAMS (1755-1831), c. 1828  
Francis Alexander (1800-80)  
after Chester Harding (1792-1886)  
oil on canvas  
30 1/4 x 25 (76.80 x 63.50)  
Gift of Henry W. Miller, 1849  
Weis 1  
Hewes Number: 1

Exhibitions:

1891, 'Portraits by American Artists,' Worcester Public Library.

Publications:

Scott E. Casper, Joanne D. Chaison, and Jeffrey D. Groves, eds., Perspectives on American Book History (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), image archive.

Hannah Adams is considered the first woman in America to have supported herself as an author. As she was prone to illness as a child, her parents permitted her to spend much of her time reading. She studied Greek, Latin, and world religions and published in 1784 An Alphabetical Compendium of the Various Sects Which Have Appeared in the World from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Present Day. This book, organized straight-forwardly, was based on years of painstaking research. Several American and British editions soon followed and brought recognition to Adams, who continued to publish throughout her life. Her other works include A Summary History of New England (1799), The History of the Jews from the Destruction of Jerusalem to the Nineteenth Century (1812), Letters on the Gospels (1824), and A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams, Written by Herself, published posthumously in 1832. Copies of these publications are part of the American Antiquarian Society's book collection. In 1827 Hannah Adams became the first woman permitted to use the library of the Boston Athenaeum, an honor previously reserved only for men.<sup>1</sup>

Chester Harding painted a portrait of Hannah Adams in 1827 that was presented to the Boston Athenaeum after her death.<sup>2</sup> Francis Alexander copied Harding's painting in 1828 for a lithograph published in the July issue of The Ladies Magazine (fig. 11). The American Antiquarian Society's version of the portrait was probably painted by Alexander about the time the lithograph was published. Henry W. Miller, a prominent Worcester businessman and hardware dealer who sold several stoves to the Society, donated it in 1849.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward T. James, ed., Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1971), 1: 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Harding's painting is illustrated in Jonathan P. Harding, The Boston Athenaeum Collection: Pre-Twentieth Century American and European Painting and Sculpture (Boston: Boston Athenaeum, 1984), 38, plate 60.