

Mary Maccarty Stiles (1807-72), c. 1837

Eliza Goodridge (1798-1882)  
watercolor on ivory  
3 1/2 x 2 11/16 (8.8900 x 6.8262)  
Bequest of Harriet E. Clarke, 1944  
Weis 87  
Hewes Number: 112

Ex. Coll.: sitter, probably to her sister Lydia Stiles Foster (cat. #49), to her daughter, Rebecca Faulkner Foster Clarke, to her daughter the donor.

Exhibitions:

1990, "Tokens of Affection: The Portrait Miniature in America," Metropolitan Museum of Art.  
1993, "Classical Taste in America, 1800-1840," Baltimore Museum of Art.

Publications:

Wendy A. Cooper, Classical Taste in America, 1800-1840 (New York: Baltimore Museum of Art and Abbeville Press, 1993): 218.

Mary Maccarty Stiles lived at home with her parents (cats. #107, 108) throughout her twenties and much of her social life revolved around the household of her happily married older sister Lydia Stiles Foster (cat. #49). Lydia worried about her sister's unmarried state and the stresses she endured while caring for their aging parents. In a letter to her husband, Lydia wrote: "I hired a sleigh and invited sister Mary to go with me in the morning.... She was afraid to go in the afternoon lest she should displease Father, and indeed I felt almost frightened that I had been instrumental in having her go at all, lest more evil than good should come of it; as Father is unwilling she should go out of the house.... I feel sometimes really griev'd for Mary and I am sure that she will not be happy until some change takes place."<sup>1</sup> This change occurred in 1836 with the death of their father, after which the daughters inherited considerable property.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lydia Stiles Foster to Alfred Dwight Foster, February 1833, Foster Family Papers, 1740-1884, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred D. Foster's memorandum noting the last words of John Stiles, September 8, 1836, Foster Family Papers. Detailed records about the estate are preserved in this manuscript collection as Foster served as his father-in-law's executor; see also, Book of Accounts, vol. 4, p. 61, Worcester County Probate Court. Lydia Stiles Foster and Mary inherited additional properties upon the death of their mother, two years later.

This portrait of Mary Maccarty Stiles may have been commissioned by Lydia Stiles Foster just before her sister's November 1837 marriage to Henry Knox Newcomb (cat. #88). Possibly the miniature was intended as a parting gift, before Mary travelled to Key West, Florida, with her new husband. Her sister wrote to her shortly after the wedding, "I have hardly recovered from the excitement of the few weeks previous to your leaving us.... I cannot yet realize that you are not where a short walk would enable me to see you, believe me that my affection for you is strong as it should be towards an only sister and your absence is deeply felt by us all."<sup>3</sup>

The artist, Eliza Goodridge, who first painted Mary Maccarty Stiles over a decade earlier (cat. #111), lived near the Stiles' when they resided in Templeton, Massachusetts. In the 1830s, the artist often visited the family in Worcester. The astonishing detail of the background of the Mary Maccarty Stiles miniature, with the patterned carpet, painted chairs, and architectural elements, is unusual for the era and reflects Goodridge's interest in interiors. The lamp on the table is repeated in a second similar miniature of Mary which was painted after her marriage and was intended as a pendant for a miniature of her new husband (cat. #89).

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<sup>3</sup> Lydia Stiles Foster to Mary Stiles Newcomb, November 17, 1837, Foster Family Papers.