

Isaiah Thomas, Jr. (1773-1819), March 1818

Ethan Allen Greenwood (1779-1856)

oil on panel

framed: 31 x 26 3/4 (80.010 x 67.9450)

signed l.l.: "Greenwood/1818"

Gift of Francis Peabody Abbot, Agnes Ann Abbot, and Mary Perkins Abbot, 1945.

Weis 124

Hewes Number: 122

Ex. Coll.: sitter, to Isaiah Thomas, Sr., to his grandson Benjamin Franklin Thomas (1813-78), to his daughter Agnes Park Thomas Olney (1837-1919), to her daughter Agnes Olney Minot (1861-1944), purchased from her estate by her nephew and nieces, the donors.

Exhibitions:

1971, Chestnut Street Congregational Church, Worcester.

Born in Boston, the only son of Isaiah Thomas, Sr., (cat. #123), Isaiah Thomas, Jr., was one of the incorporators of the American Antiquarian Society in 1812. He also served as the Society's Treasurer from 1813 until his death in 1819. He was remembered by a fellow member as "a man of large intelligence and fond of books, wrote with ease and rapidity, of excellent conversational powers, fond of and devoted to his home and family."<sup>1</sup> Thomas was taught the business of printing by his father and started his career as a bookseller in 1792 at the age of nineteen. Five years later he married Mary Weld (cat. #132), the daughter of a wealthy Boston merchant. In 1799 he became the co-publisher of the Massachusetts Spy, sharing the masthead with his father until 1801, when he was made the sole publisher and editor.

Thomas bought out his father's large printing, papermaking and publishing business in 1802 when Isaiah Thomas, Sr., retired. In 1810, the younger Thomas moved to Boston, and continued to issue the Spy and the family's almanac, as well as to print books such as Bernhard Faust's A New Guide to Health (1810) and Charles Robbins's The Drum & Fife Instructor (1812).

Thomas's business interests were adversely effected by the War of 1812. He sold the Spy in that year and tried to expand his bookselling business by opening shops in Connecticut, Maine, and Maryland.<sup>2</sup> He continued to issue an interesting variety of almanacs and books until 1819.

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<sup>1</sup> Levi Lincoln, "Isaiah Thomas, Jun." Reminiscences of the Original Associates of the Worcester Fire Society (Worcester: Edward R. Fiske, 1862): 55.

<sup>2</sup> Printer's Biography Index, Imprint Card Catalog, American Antiquarian Society.

Copies of many of his publications are preserved in the imprint collection of the American Antiquarian Society.

Thomas died in the summer of 1819 as the result of an accident in Boston. His father noted in his diary on June 25th, "My son died, aged 45 years, occasioned by the wounds he received by a Fall the Evening before."<sup>3</sup> Two days later, Isaiah Thomas, Jr., who left a widow and nine children, was buried in Worcester. His father wrote, "My son's remains were deposited in my tomb in the North burying ground this morning at 8 o'clock. Prayers by Dr. Freeman at the house of Eben T. Andrews - from whence the corpse was carried to the burying ground."<sup>4</sup>

This portrait of Isaiah Thomas was painted the year before his death by the Boston artist Ethan Allen Greenwood.<sup>5</sup> In the midst of his business financial crisis, Thomas evidently managed to find the \$60.00 the artist usually charged for such images. Given the sitter's untimely death, the portrait was certainly cherished by the family as the last likeness of Isaiah Thomas, Jr. It was kept by his father and hung in the best bedroom of his home in Worcester.<sup>6</sup> After the death of Isaiah Thomas, Sr., the portrait descended to Benjamin Franklin Thomas (cat. #119), the sitter's youngest son. It was loaned to the American Antiquarian Society in 1940 and was donated by the family five years later.

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah Thomas Diary, June 25, 1819, Isaiah Thomas Papers 1748-1874, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., June 27, 1819.

<sup>5</sup> Ethan Allen Greenwood Papers 1801-1839, American Antiquarian Society Manuscripts Collection. According to Greenwood's memorandum book, he painted Isaiah Thomas, Jr., on March 11, 1818, one of fifty-eight likenesses he completed that year. For more on Greenwood see Georgia Brady Bumgardner, "The Early Career of Ethan Allen Greenwood," in Itinerancy in New England and New York (Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, 1984): 212-225; and Georgia Brady Barnhill, "Extracts from the Journals of Ethan Allen Greenwood: Portrait Painter and Museum Proprietor," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 103(April 1993): 91-178.

<sup>6</sup> Probate Inventory of Isaiah Thomas, Sr., Worcester County Probate Records, 1831, copy in the Thomas Family Papers 1815-1887. The inventory lists items in the North Front Room, including, a "Portrait of I. Thomas, Jr.," valued at \$20.00, as well as one bureau, a washstand, the "Best Bed and Pillows," and two drawings with needlework.