

Isaiah Thomas (1749-1831), 1804
Mary Thomas Fowle Thomas (1750-1818), 1804

Attr. to Gerrit Schipper (1775-c. 1830)
pastel on paper
Isaiah Thomas: 8 13/16 x 7 13/16 (22.4 x 19.8)
Mary Thomas Fowle Thomas: 8 3/4 x 7 7/8 (22.2 x 20)
Gift of Frances Crocker Sloane, 1945
Weis 119, 126
Hewes Number: 124 & 125

Ex. Coll.: sitters, owned by their granddaughter Elizabeth Cornelia Simmons Randall (1813-1891), to her daughters Clara Elizabeth and Mary Thomas Randall, around 1914 to Frances Hill Bigelow, sold via the Copley Gallery in 1928 to the donor.¹

Exhibitions:

Isaiah Thomas portrait:
1969, "A Society's Chief Joys," Grolier Club, New York.
1975, "Paul Revere's Boston," Museum of Fine Arts, no. 254.

Publications:

Isaiah Thomas Portrait:
A Society's Chief Joys, (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1969): 9.
Richard Steele, "Isaiah Thomas," in Worcester People and Places, (Worcester: Worcester Historical Museum, 1975): 25.
Paul Revere's Boston, (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1975): no. 254.

Shortly after his retirement, Isaiah Thomas and his second wife Mary had these pastel profile portraits drawn. Mary, the widow of Isaac Fowle (d. 1777), was Isaiah Thomas's cousin and married him on May 26, 1779. A friend remembered, "[T]he domestick arrangements of a large household were submitted to her. These she managed with skill, prudence and economy.... Her attendance at publick worship and on all the ordinances of the gospel was constant."² Mary had two daughters by her earlier marriage and also raised Isaiah Thomas's two children by his first wife. Her obituary noted, "As the head of a family, she was faithful to the charge committed to her, and endeavored with scrupulous exactness to perform her duty towards those over whom she

¹ These pastels may be the images bequeathed in 1831 by Isaiah Thomas, Sr. to his grandson Isaiah Thomas III (b. 1810). See Charles Nichols, The Portraits of Isaiah Thomas (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1921): 9.

² Aaron Bancroft, The Leaf An Emblem of Human Life, (Worcester: William Manning, 1818), unpgd.

was called to exercise her protection and care.... Her heart always melted to the tale of woe, and her hand was never slow to follow its sacred impulse."³

Once thought to be the work of the pastellist William Doyle (1769-1828), these pastels are now attributed to the Dutch artist Gerrit Schipper. Schipper was born in Amsterdam the son of a sailmaker and, after traveling to Brussels, Paris, and Russia, came to New York in 1802 where he began producing chalk profile portraits. Schipper spent part of 1803 in Boston and moved in the spring of 1804 to Salem, Massachusetts.⁴ There he may have met Isaiah Thomas, Jr. (cat. #122), who often managed the portion of the Thomas family's printing empire located along the North Shore.

In August of 1804, Schipper placed an advertisement in the Worcester newspaper which stated: "G. Schipper, an eminent painter from Germany, has it in contemplation to visit Worcester, in order to favor those Ladies and Gentlemen who may wish to have correct likenesses taken; he executes them in colored crayons, set in an elegant frame and glazed for Ten Dollars, and if not an approved likeness, no payment will be expected; he requires but one sitting of three quarters of an hour. Specimens of his painting may be seen by applying to Isaiah Thomas, Jun."⁵ The artist travelled to Worcester the following month and announced in the local paper, "G. SCHIPPER informs the Ladies and Gentlemen of Worcester, who may wish to have correct likenesses taken that he has arrived in town and shall be happy to wait upon them at Mrs. Barker's.... Specimens' of his paintings may be seen by applying to him at his lodgings or of Isaiah Thomas, Jun."⁶ During his time in Worcester, Schipper drew profile pastels of several members of the Thomas family (cats. #105, 124, 125, 126, 132, 143).⁷

³ Massachusetts Spy, November 25, 1818.

⁴ For more on Schipper see Jeanne Riger, "New Light on Gerrit Schipper, the Painter," The Clarion 15(Winter 1990): 65-70.

⁵ Worcester Spy, August 1, 1804, p. 3. The advertisement also ran on August 8th, 15th, 22nd.

⁶ Worcester Spy, September 12, 1804, p. 3 and September 19, 1804, p. 4.

⁷ Riger, 66. Five portraits are known, including these two pastels, a second profile portrait of Isaiah Thomas (cat. #126), a second of Mary Thomas Fowle Thomas wearing a dark dress, profiles of Isaiah Thomas, Jr., and his wife Mary Weld Thomas (cat. #132), and a portrait of her sister Hannah Weld (cat. #143). Photographs of the second

This pair of pastels descended through the Thomas family. In 1928, they were offered for sale by a Boston gallery and Clarence Brigham, the librarian of the American Antiquarian Society, tried to raise the funds needed to purchase them by appealing to other branches of the Thomas family. He wrote to one descendant, "Not a day passes but that we have inquiry in some way regarding Isaiah Thomas or that we fail to recognize our indebtedness to the scholar and philanthropist that founded this Society over a century ago.... If there is any place in the world that these two portraits ought to be preserved permanently, it is in this Library building."⁸ The pastels were purchased by a family member who retained them for seventeen years before donating them to the Society in 1945.

Mary Thomas Fowle Thomas and Isaiah Thomas, Jr., portraits are on file at the American Antiquarian Society and the Frick Art Reference Library (FARL #50673, #50672).

⁸ Clarence Brigham to Mrs. William Sloane, October 31, 1928, American Antiquarian Society Archives.