

Isaiah Thomas (1749-1831), 1805

William M. S. Doyle (1769-1828)
watercolor on ivory
2 3/4 x 2 13/16 (6.9850 x 7.1437)
partial signature at l.l.: "...yle/.5"
Gift of Isaac Rand Thomas, 1947
Weis 123
Hewes Number: 127

Ex. Coll.: sitter, bequeathed to his granddaughter Elizabeth Cornelia Simmons Randall (1813-91), to her daughters Clara Elizabeth and Mary Thomas Randall, purchased from them by the Boston antique dealer Otto Wiecker, sold to the donor in 1914.¹

Publications:

Freemason's Magazine 2(November 1811): 81, engraved by William R. Jones.

This miniature of Isaiah Thomas may be the portrait he recorded sitting for in his diary on November 25, 1805.² A receipt for a deposit paid to the Boston miniaturist William M. S. Doyle is preserved in Thomas's business papers and states: "Boston, Nov. 10, 1805/Rec'd of Isaiah Thomas, the sum of Twenty-five Dollars in part payment for miniatures amounting to Fifty Dollars, Wm. M. S. Doyle."³ An 1805 advertisement placed by the artist in the New England Palladium stated that he charged between twelve and twenty dollars for painted miniatures, so a fee of fifty dollars charged to Thomas indicates that multiple images were produced.⁴ It is unclear from the receipt if Doyle painted other members of the Thomas family at this time, or if he painted several versions of Thomas's own portrait.

¹ Charles L. Nichols, Portraits of Isaiah Thomas (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1921): 13-14, no. 10.

² Isaiah Thomas Diary, November 25, 1805, Isaiah Thomas Papers 1748-1874, American Antiquarian Society. Thomas noted: "Sat for mina^e." In the next entry, for November 27, Thomas used a ditto mark indicating that he sat again for the artist.

³ Isaiah Thomas Receipt Books 1802-1819, vol. 18, p. 48, Isaiah Thomas Papers. A second receipt from the following summer continues the account, "Boston, July Nineteenth 1806. Rec'd of Isaiah Thomas, Thirty-five Dollars, on account of Miniatures, etc., Wm. M. S. Doyle." Isaiah Thomas Receipt Books 1802-1819, vol. 18, p. 54.

⁴ New England Palladium, December 17, 1805.

Doyle began working as a miniature painter and silhouette cutter in Boston around 1803. He set up his studio in the Columbian Museum which was operated by Daniel Bowen (c. 1760-1856). In 1806 Doyle joined Bowen as a proprietor of the museum, which included paintings of prominent Americans, wax sculptures, and natural history specimens.⁵ While running the museum, Doyle continued to produce dozens of pastel portraits, silhouettes and watercolor miniatures of Boston area residents.⁶ This portrait of Isaiah Thomas is one of his earlier attempts. A nineteenth-century copy of this miniature is also owned by the American Antiquarian Society (cat. #128).

⁵ In 1825 the Columbian Museum collection was purchased by the artist Ethan Allen Greenwood, see 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.

⁶ Arthur B. and Sybil B. Kern, "The Pastel Portraits of William B. Doyle," The Clarion 13(Fall 1988): 41-47.