

Daniel Webster (1782-1852), 1895

William Willard (1819-1904)

after study and daguerreotype made by the artist in 1852

oil on canvas

35 x 28 (88.90 x 71.12)

Gift of Charles Taylor Tatman, 1933

Weis 134

Hewes Number: 142

Ex. Coll.: artist, at his death to his attorney, the donor.

Exhibitions:

c. 1895-1903, loaned by the artist to the Fifth Avenue Hotel,
New York City.

Because of his fame and recognition, Daniel Webster had his portrait painted many times.¹ This portrait is a copy made by the Massachusetts artist William Willard (cat. #152) from a portrait Willard painted of Webster in June of 1852, four months before the statesman's death. Willard recalled, "I went to [Webster] at his law office in Old Court Street. . . . When I asked him to sit for me that I might paint his portrait he replied drearily that he was all worn out, that he had been painted to death. . . . While I talked with him I had been making a pencil sketch, as well as I could, and he noticed what I was doing, and finally said to me, with a shade more affability, that if I could sketch him in his office, I might do so. I then ventured to ask him if he would allow me to pose him for a daguerreotype, that it might serve me in place of a sketch in painting a portrait."² Webster agreed to have a daguerreotype made and the two men went across the street to the studio of Albert Southworth (1811-1894) and Josiah Hawes (1808-1901) to have Webster's photograph made. The resulting full-plate daguerreotype (fig. #), with the lighting arranged by Willard, was considered the best photograph of Webster ever made and was called a "magnificent likeness upon the silver mirror."³

¹ See Charles Henry Hart, "Life Portraits of Daniel Webster," *McClure's Magazine* (May 1897): 619-28; and James Barber, *The Godlike Black Dan: A Selection of Portraits of Daniel Webster* (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, 1982).

² *Boston Transcript*, December 10, 1902.

³ Unidentified clipping, American Antiquarian Society Newsclipping File. The daguerreotype is in the collection of The Baker Library at Dartmouth College. For more on Willard's use of photography see the entry on his self-portrait (cat. #152).

Willard made sixteen portraits of Webster based on his 1852 studies and the daguerreotype.⁴ The American Antiquarian Society's copy is the last the artist painted, completed in 1895 when the market for Webster's likeness was slowing. The artist loaned the image to a large hotel in New York City, where it hung in the lobby for nearly a decade. After Willard's death, the portrait became the property of his attorney, who presented it to the Society, along with a portrait of Charles Sumner (cat. #115) also painted by Willard.

⁴ "Report of the Librarian," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 43(October 1933): 222-23. Reproductions of several of Willard's other Webster images, including those owned by the Pilgrim Society in Plymouth, Massachusetts and the University of Michigan Museum of Art, are on file at the American Antiquarian Society.