

David West, Sr. (1765-1810), c. 1796

Christian Gullager (1759-1826)

oil on canvas

26 x 20 (66.0400 x 50.800)

Bequest of Henry Winchester Cunningham, 1930

Weis 139

Hewes Number: 146

Ex. Coll.: Sitter; to his wife Abigail Leonard West; to her daughter Abigail West Cunningham (1796-1876); to one of her sons James, Horace, or David; to James's son, the donor.

Exhibitions:

1949, 'Christian Gullager,' Worcester Art Museum, no. 23.

1971, 'Early American Paintings from the Worcester Art Museum and the American Antiquarian Society,' Worcester Art Museum.

Publications:

Louisa Dresser, 'Christian Gullager,' Art in America (July 1946), 166-67.

Scott E. Casper, Joanne D. Chaison, and Jeffrey D. Groves, eds., Perspectives on American Book History (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), image archive.

David West, Sr., was born in Boston, where he became a bookseller and publisher in 1787, at the age of twenty-two. He reached the peak of his career as a publisher in the 1790s. His 1793 catalog indicates that he maintained a widely varied stock of material, including: 'a very extensive collection of the latest and most approved authors in divinity, law, physick, surgery, chemistry, history, biography, voyages, travels, miscellanies, novels, poetry, musick, arts and sciences, philosophy, navigation, astronomy, geography, architecture trade and commerce, mathmaticks, bookkeeping, &c., &c..'¹ The following year, 1794, was West's most active as a book publisher, when he produced forty titles, including A Complete Edition of the Poets of Great Britain, an abridgement of John Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding, and Susannah Centvivre's farce, The Busy Body: A Comedy.²

In 1796 West went into partnership with his younger brother John West (1770-1827), who was also a bookseller and publisher in Boston.³ The two brothers opened a book and stationery shop at 36 Marlborough Street and took out newspaper advertisements in the Columbian Centinel and Independent Chronicle indicating that they were ready to supply both public and private libraries with the latest reading material available.⁴ Although he and his brother dissolved their business relationship in 1798, partnerships seemed to appeal to David

West. Later in his career he paired up with booksellers such as Oliver Cromwell Greenleaf (c. 1777-1843) and Lemuel Blake (1775-1861) to increase his stock and decrease the risks of the publishing business.⁵ In March 1796, David West entered into a contract with Ebenezer Larkin (c. 1769-1813) and Isaiah Thomas, Sr. (cat. #123), in order to share the costs of printing William Perry's Dictionary and Nicholas Pike's Arithmetic.⁶ These and many other books published by West are preserved in the American Antiquarian Society's imprint collection.

Around 1796, David West commissioned the Danish immigrant Christian Gullager to paint portraits of himself and his two small children (cats. #144, 147).⁷ Gullager, who seven years earlier had painted Colonel John May (cat. #86), was in Boston making portraits until the autumn of 1797 when he moved to New York City. West may have been introduced to Gullager by the printmaker Samuel Hill (c. 1766-1804), who illustrated publications for West and engraved drawings designed by Gullager. The completed portrait captures the well-dressed West around the age of thirty-one, and preserves the likeness of a prominent and youthful Boston bookseller and publisher.

In 1810, after West's death, the portrait was owned by his wife and daughter. It descended through the family to American Antiquarian Society member Henry W. Cunningham (cat. #36), who wrote to the Society's director in 1921, '[West's] association with Isaiah Thomas made me think that he might be of interest to the A.A.S....I have in my house in Boston a fine oil portrait of him which I intend to give at some time to the A.A.S...It is painted by Christian Gullager and would be a handsome ornament as well as an example of an early New England artist and a portrait of an associate of Thomas.'⁸ The Society readily agreed with Cunningham and the three West family portraits were bequeathed to the American Antiquarian Society in 1930.

¹ David West's Catalogue of Books for Sale (Boston: Thomas & Andrews, 1793). This catalogue and one for 1799 are preserved in the American Antiquarian Society's imprint collection.

² David Paul Ragan, in Benjamin Franklin, ed., Boston Printers, Publishers, and Booksellers 1640-1800 (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980), 483;

and the Printer's Authority File and Imprint Card Catalogue, American Antiquarian Society.

³ See West, Richardson & Lord Business Papers 1792-1855, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection, for John West's business papers, including material from 1796 when he and his brother formed D. & J. West.

⁴ Rollo G. Silver, The Boston Book Trade, 1790-1799 (New York: Frederick R. Goff, 1951), 302.

⁵ Silver, The Boston Book Trade, 1790-1799, and The Boston Book Trade, 1800-1825 (New York: New York Public Library, 1949), 46-47.

⁶ Isaiah Thomas Papers 1748-1874, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection. Starting in 1797, West also sold Thomas's annual almanacs in his Boston shop.

⁷ A portrait of West's mother, Sarah Fresbury West, c. 1796, is signed by Gullager and is owned by the New-York Historical Society. It is illustrated in Catalog of American Portraits in the New-York Historical Society (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 2: 881-82.

⁸ Henry W. Cunningham to Waldo Lincoln, June 21, 1921, American Antiquarian Society Archives.