

Thomas Lindall Winthrop (1760-1841), c. 1838

Charles Osgood (1809-90)
after his own 1837 composition
oil on canvas
36 1/4 x 29 (92.08 x 73.66)
Gift of Thomas Lindall Winthrop, 1838
Weis 151
Hewes number: 156

Ex. Coll.: Sitter; commissioned for the American Antiquarian Society.

Thomas L. Winthrop was elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society in 1813, became a councillor in 1821, and served as vice president under Isaiah Thomas, Sr. (cat. 123 et seq.), in 1828. After Thomas's death in 1831, Winthrop became the second president of the Society, a position he retained until his death. Under his direction, the second volume of the Society's Transactions was published, and the library was expanded by the young Christopher Columbus Baldwin (cats. 2-3), who must have served as an energetic foil to the elderly Winthrop.¹ Winthrop donated hundreds of books to the library, including John Torrey's A Flora of the Northern and Middle Sections of the United States (1824) and Juan Bautista de Erro y Azpiroz's The Alphabet of Primitive Language of Spain (1829). After his death, a fellow member recalled: '[Winthrop's] attention was carefully directed to every subject involving in any manner the prosperity or advancement of the objects of the institution. A more vigilant guardian of its reputation and interests, or a more indefatigable purveyor of whatever might add to its literary and antiquarian treasures, could not easily have been found; and the institution was fortunate in possessing so liberal and appreciative a head.'²

Winthrop was born in New London, Connecticut, but spent much of his youth in Boston, where he became a successful merchant after he graduated from Harvard in 1780. He served in various public offices in the city before he became the lieutenant governor of the Commonwealth in 1826. He retired from this position in 1833 and devoted himself to the support of historical preservation. In 1800, as a young man, he was made a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society and in 1836 became the only individual to concurrently serve as president of both the American Antiquarian Society and the Massachusetts Historical Society. In his retirement, Winthrop fed his intellect with volumes of literature, history and science, and was a respected scholar. A contemporary recalled Winthrop's voracious appetite for books, saying: 'Such

were...the occupations of his venerated old age...and such the course of reading and general remark and inquiry, that he seemed not so much to grow old as to become more and more a receptacle of the best knowledge of former and present times.’³

In January 1838 the AAS Council requested its aging president to sit for his portrait. The previous year, Winthrop had arranged to have the Salem, Massachusetts, artist Charles Osgood paint his likeness for the Massachusetts Historical Society. Rather than sit again, Winthrop requested Osgood to copy the 1837 image.⁴ When the copy was presented to the American Antiquarian Society in May 1838, the Council noted: ‘The President caused his portrait to be painted and presented to us, a memorial of great value, as a beautiful specimen of art, but more precious as a faithful representation of one whose virtues have secured warm regard, and whose constant munificence has been recognized with respected gratitude.’⁵

After an unsuccessful career as a bank clerk, Osgood, the son of a ship captain, went to Boston and studied painting with Chester Harding (1792-1866). He began painting portraits for paying customers in Boston in 1827 and in the following year moved back to Salem to open his own studio. He earned enough to finance a trip to England and set sail on the packet ship Boston in 1830. The ship was struck by lightning while running from Boston to Liverpool, via Charleston, South Carolina, and the painter spent two days afloat on wreckage with other members of the crew before being rescued and returning to Boston, unharmed.⁶

In 1835, Osgood began living half the year in Salem and spending the winter months in New York City.⁷ It was in his hometown, however, that he was most successful. He was Salem’s ‘favorite local artist, whose brush...has perpetuated the features of more of our Salem worthies than any, and probably all, other portrait painters who have lived amongst us.’⁸ Some of Osgood’s more famous sitters included Nathaniel Hawthorne, John Quincy Adams, and the prosperous shipowner and merchant William Orne.⁹

¹ George Folsom, ‘Memoir of Thomas L. Winthrop,’ Archaeologia Americana 3 (1857): 340. During most of his tenure as AAS president, Winthrop was confined to his home by ill health.

² Folsom, ‘Memoir of Thomas L. Winthrop,’ 337.

³ William Jenks, ‘Memoir of Lieutenant-Governor Winthrop,’ Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society 4th series 2 (1854): 214.

⁴ The original portrait is owned by the Massachusetts Historical Society and is illustrated in Andrew Oliver, Ann Millsbaugh Huff, and Edward W. Hanson, Portraits in the Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston: Massachusetts

Historical Society, 1988): 130-31. Winthrop had Osgood make two copies from the original, one for AAS and the other for a family member.

⁵ Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society (May 1838): 351. At the time he presented the portrait, Winthrop also donated 128 books, mainly genealogies and local history texts.

⁶ Osgood later advised the painter Fitz Hugh Lane (1804-65) of the details of the event. Lane's small watercolor of the disaster is owned by the Cape Ann Historical Association and is illustrated in John Wilmerding et al., Paintings by Fitz Hugh Lane (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1988), 63.

⁷ The verso of the AAS portrait of Winthrop bears the stamp 'P. Caffé/New York,' indicating that the image may have been completed while Osgood was there.

⁸ Barbara Hayden, 'Central Street and the Ingalls House,' Historical Collections of the Essex Institute 85 (1949): 86.

⁹ Hayden, 'Central Street and the Ingalls House,' 87. See also Osgood Record Book, in Osgood Family Papers, Peabody/Essex Institute Manuscript Collection, Salem.