

Unknown woman, possibly Louisa Ann Adams [Willey], c. 1870

Anonymous

watercolor on ivory

3 1/4 x 2 3/8 (8.25 x 6.03)

American Antiquarian Society purchase, 1971

Hewes number: 164

Ex. Coll.: Acquired from Gordon Meisner, book dealer.

This unframed ivory miniature was found by American Antiquarian Society staff inside a copy of The American Lady's Pocket Book for the Year 1818, issued in Philadelphia by Abraham Small (c. 1764-1829). The American Lady's Pocket Book was primarily an almanac, recording the phases of the moon and other yearly and seasonal events. This particular volume also contained essays and social commentary, including 'Woman Essential to Social Felicity,' 'Remarks on Behavior in Company,' and 'New Country Dances and Waltzes for 1817.'

The palm-sized book, bound in red leather, is inscribed several times in graphite with the name Louisa Ann Adams and also, in one instance, Louisa Ann Adams Willey. Also found in the volume was a small lock of blonde hair, tied with blue satin ribbon and curled neatly inside a fold of paper inscribed: 'C. W. Adams, aged 2 years & 1 month.'

The dress and hair style of the elderly sitter dates from the latter half of the nineteenth century and can have no association with the 1818 date of the almanac. The miniature itself bears awkward corrections to the eyes and shoulder, indicating that the artist was somewhat inexperienced, although obviously trained in the craft. How the miniature ended up in the almanac, and if the inscriptions in the book have any bearing on the identity of the sitter, remain unknown.