

JOHN BUSH (1755-1816), 1785/86  
CHARITY PLATT BUSH (1761-88), 1785/86  
Matthew Pratt (1734-1805)  
oil on canvas  
John Bush: 29 1/2 x 25 3/4 (74.93 x 65.40)  
Charity Platt Bush: 29 3/4 x 26 (75.60 x 66.04)  
Gift of Maria Pratt Chaffin, 1896  
Weis 19, 21  
Hewes Numbers: 17 & 18

Ex. Coll.: Sitters; to their daughter Cornelia Bush Pratt (b. 1784); in 1879 to her son John Bush Pratt (1808-95); to his sister, the donor.

Exhibitions:

John Bush:

1949, 'From Colony to Nation,' Art Institute of Chicago, no. 97.  
1971, 'Early American Paintings from the Collections of the Worcester Art Museum and the American Antiquarian Society,' Worcester Art Museum.  
1977, 'Wellsprings of a Nation,' Worcester Art Museum, no. 260.

Charity Platt Bush:

1921-22, 'Loan Exhibition of English and American Paintings of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,' Worcester Art Museum.  
1971, 'Early American Paintings from the Collections of the Worcester Art Museum and the American Antiquarian Society,' Worcester Art Museum.  
1977, 'Wellsprings of a Nation,' Worcester Art Museum, no. 261.

Publications:

William Sawitsky, Matthew Pratt (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1942), 41-43, plates 28-29.

During the Revolutionary War John Bush of Boylston, Massachusetts, was an innkeeper and a firm Tory, who, along with his father and brothers, was restricted in his movements around Massachusetts by Whig politicians. After the war, Bush moved to New York City where he became a successful cattle merchant and commission broker. In 1879 the family genealogist wrote: 'He was an active man of no particular religious views, a free thinker and an independent character.'<sup>1</sup>

John Bush married three times. His marriage to his first wife, Charity Platt, took place on December 24, 1780. According to family history, she 'was celebrated for her beauty and called the Beauty of Long Island.'<sup>2</sup> Some time between 1795 and 1800, Bush retired to Worcester with his family, bringing these portraits with him.

Once thought to be by Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827), the portraits were attributed to the Philadelphia artist Matthew Pratt in 1942. Pratt, the son of a goldsmith, learned to paint while an apprentice to his uncle James Claypoole (1720-86). In 1764 he travelled to London to study with the American artist Benjamin West (1738-1820) at the Royal Academy. He returned to the United States four years later and set up his studio in Philadelphia, where he painted elegant portraits of members of the nation's growing middle class, including John Bush and his wife.<sup>3</sup>

About six years after these portraits were painted, Bush commissioned another of himself and one of his second wife, Hannah Ackley (cats. 19-20), from an artist named MacKay. This commission resulted in an outstanding pair of decorative likenesses, and, taken together, the four images serve as a remarkable record of John Bush's taste as a consumer and portrait patron. The two sets of portraits descended through different branches of the Bush family but were both given to the American Antiquarian Society in 1896.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. William Frederic Holcombe, The Bush Family, 1879, Connecticut Historical Society Manuscript Collection, typescript by Elaine Bush Prince (Framingham, Mass.: 1980), 90.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Pratt Chaffin to AAS, April 21, 1896, AAS Archives.

<sup>3</sup> For more on Pratt, see William Sawitsky, Matthew Pratt (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1942).