

JOHN CHANDLER (1720/21-1800), 18th century

Anonymous

oil on canvas

25 3/4 x 21 5/8 (65.4050 x 54.9275)

Gift of Lucretia Chandler Bancroft on behalf of the Family of Reverend Aaron Bancroft,  
1839

Weis 28

Hewes Number: 24

Ex. Coll.: Sitter, to his second wife Mary Church Chandler (d. 1783), to her step-daughter, the donor.

Publications:

William Lincoln and Charles Hershey, History of Worcester (Worcester: Charles Hersey, 1862): 231. Engraving by Hezekiah Wright (b. 1828).

George Chandler, The Chandler Family (Worcester, Massachusetts, 1872, 1883): 227. Wright engraving.

Andrew McFarland Davis, Confiscation of John Chandler's Estate (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1907): frontispiece.

Clarence W. Bowen, History of Woodstock, Connecticut (Norwood, Massachusetts: Plimpton Press, 1926): 142.

Edward A. Jones, Loyalists of Massachusetts (London: St. Catherine's Press, 1930): 81, pl. 10 (incorrectly as by Winthrop Chandler).

In the eighteenth century, John Chandler owned extensive acreage around Worcester, Massachusetts, where he was a leading citizen of the town. At various times he served as town treasurer, town clerk, selectman, and judge of probate. He was also a colonel in the local militia and in 1767 became a representative to the Council of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

A Tory politician, Chandler was a firm Loyalist whose politics by 1774 did not blend easily with the patriotic beliefs of many of his Worcester neighbors: They nicknamed him "Tory John." In 1774 he left his wife and children behind and fled to Boston, seeking the safety of the British garrison there. A year later he followed the English troops to Halifax, Nova Scotia where he remained until departing for London.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Chandler see Chandler Bullock, John Chandler and a Few of His Descendants (Worcester Historical Society, 1922).

In England, Chandler made several claims against the crown for reimbursement of his Worcester property which had been seized by patriots. Although many Loyalist Americans made extravagant claims in hopes of rebuilding their fortunes, Chandler earned the name "The Honest Refugee" by asking for only a modest amount to cover his personal belongings and acreage.

As Chandler was pursuing his claims in England, Worcester's new Judge of Probate Levi Lincoln (1749-1820) enforced the 1777 act of the General Court that permitted the settlement of absent Loyalists' estates as if they were deceased. A volume of transcripts of court actions surrounding the Chandler case, including several petitions made by Chandler's wife Mary (d. 1783), who remained in Worcester with their children, is preserved in the manuscript collection of the American Antiquarian Society.

The origin of this portrait, unknown since its arrival at the American Antiquarian Society in 1839, remains uncertain. The donor, the sitter's daughter, did not know the name of the artist or the date of the portrait, but family history maintained that it had been painted in England during Chandler's exile. An 1862 history of Worcester featured an engraving of the portrait which included the caption "1764, aet 53."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the caption is problematical because in 1764 Chandler was only 44 years old. If the age in the inscription is correct, the date on the portrait would be around 1774, when John Chandler began his life as a refugee. Although the painting was once thought to be by Winthrop Chandler, this attribution was dismissed by Nina Fletcher Little in 1947. Examination of the portrait by art historians Lawrence Park and Frank

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, unpagged. Chandler's claim of £11,607, was allowed in full.

<sup>3</sup> John Chandler Transcripts, 1777-1788, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

<sup>4</sup> William Lincoln and Charles Hershey, History of Worcester (Worcester: Charles Hersey, 1862): 231. The engraving was done by Hezekiah Wright (b. 1828).

<sup>5</sup> Bullock, unpagged. In addition, the sitter's great-grandson John Chandler Bancroft Davis (1822-1907), claimed that the painting was done in London in 1784, when the sitter was 64/65 years old.

<sup>6</sup> Elthelwyn Manning, Frick Art Reference Library to Clifford Shipton, March 5, 1947, American Antiquarian Society Archives.

W. Bayley resulted in the conclusion that the portrait was probably not painted in America, but more likely was produced in Canada or in England as family history maintained.

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<sup>7</sup> Clarence Brigham to Clarence Bowen, December 2, 1926, American Antiquarian Society Archives.