

WINTHROP CHANDLER (1747-90), c. 1789

MARY GLEASON CHANDLER (1752-89), c. 1789

Winthrop Chandler

oil on canvas

Winthrop: 26 1/8 x 23 5/8 (66.36 x 60.01) (framed)

Mary: 29 5/8 x 27 (75.25 x 68.58) (framed)

Gift of Molly Eliza Stark Hillman in memory of her mother, Mary Gleason Chandler Stark, 1925

Weis 31, 29

Hewes Numbers: 27 & 28

Ex. Coll.: Sitters; to their son Winthrop Hilton Chandler (1783-1861); to his son Samuel Chandler (1812-71); to his wife Harriet Rose Chandler (1818-68); about 1868 to a cousin, Mary Gleason Chandler Stark (1841-1921); to the donor.

Exhibitions:

Winthrop Chandler:

1947, 'Winthrop Chandler,' Worcester Art Museum.

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

1974, 'American Self-Portraits, 1670-1973,' National Portrait Gallery.

1977, 'Wellsprings of a Nation,' Worcester Art Museum.

1989, 'Winthrop Chandler and His Contemporaries,' David Schorsch, Inc., New York, no. 11.

1990, 'Culture and Commerce: The Artisan Entrepreneurs of Worcester County, 1790-1860,' Fitchburg Art Museum.

1992, 'Art in Connecticut: Early Days to the Gilded Age,' William Benton Museum of Art, University of Connecticut, Storrs.

Mary Gleason Chandler:

1947, 'Winthrop Chandler,' Worcester Art Museum.

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

Publications:

Winthrop Chandler:

Frank W. Bayley, Little Known American Portrait Painters (Boston: Copley Gallery, 1919), no. 2.

Bowen, History of Woodstock, 1: 131.

George Chandler, The Chandler Family (Worcester: D. Clapp & Son, 1872; Charles Hamilton, 1883), 277. Engraving by Hezekiah Wright Smith (b. 1828).

Dresser, 1969, 722.

William Dunlap, History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States, 3 vols. (New York: George P. Scott & Co., 1834), 3: 290.

William Lincoln and Charles Hersey, History of Worcester (Worcester: Charles Hersey, 1862), 384. Smith engraving.

Jean Lipman and Tom Armstrong, eds., American Folk Painters of Three Centuries (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1980), 26-34.

Nina Fletcher Little, 'Winthrop Chandler,' Art in America 35 (April 1947): 144-46.

New England Historical and Genealogical Register 33 (October 1879): 381. Smith engraving. Ann van Devanter and Alfred Frankenstein, American Self-Portraits, 1670-1973 (New York: 1974), 34-45.

Mary Gleason Chandler:

Bowen, History of Woodstock, 1: 131.

Nina Fletcher Little, 'Winthrop Chandler,' 144-46.

In the eighteenth century, Winthrop Chandler worked as a portrait painter in central New England, taking likenesses of his family and neighbors. He was born in Woodstock, Connecticut, a son of Captain William and Jemima Chandler, and spent most of his life in the town of his birth. Chandler began painting portraits around 1770, and his compositions show that he developed respectable talent with the brush, although he may never have had formal training.¹

In 1772 Chandler married Mary Gleason of Dudley, Massachusetts, the daughter of the Reverend Charles and Bethiah Gleason. They settled in Woodstock and had seven children. Although Chandler had many skills, and often painted houses or worked as a carver or gilder when he could not find commissions, financial problems plagued the family.

In an effort to improve his circumstances, Chandler moved his family to Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1785 and set up shop as a house painter and gilder. The move did not lead to financial stability, however, and the last five years of his life were difficult. In 1789, two weeks before her thirty-seventh birthday, Mary Gleason Chandler died of tuberculosis, and the children were dispersed among other households in the family. A little over a year later, Chandler moved in with his brother Theophilus of Thompson, Connecticut (cat. 25), where he died impoverished. The artist's dire circumstances are reflected in the fact that 'eight weeks prior to his death he deeded all his remaining real estate to the Selectmen of the town of Thompson, Connecticut, in return for which they were to care for him in his last illness and to pay for the expense of his funeral.'²

Winthrop Chandler's obituary mentions his portraits and reveals an interest in botany: 'By profession he was a house painter; but many good likenesses on canvas shew [*sic*] he could guide the pencil of a limner. He has left a manuscript which discovers that he had merit as a botanist - many plants...are, in this manuscript, not only well delineated but accurately and botanically described. The world was not his enemy; but as is too common, his genius was not

nurtured on the bosom of Encouragement. Embarrassments, like strong weeds in a garden of delicate flowers, checked his usefulness and disheartened the man.’³

The Chandler portraits remained in the family until they were given to the American Antiquarian Society in 1925. The donor’s mother recalled: ‘These Portraits were found some years ago by Samuel Chandler, of Hillsdale, Mich., a cousin of my father’s. They were in an old chest, tumbled in with other things. Cousin Samuel did all he could to straighten and smooth them out and framed them.’⁴

The portraits attracted the attention of American Antiquarian Society member Clarence Bowen (cat. 10), who had seen them in the possession of Mary Gleason Chandler Stark while doing research on his History of Woodstock, Connecticut. He lobbied Stark’s daughter for the portraits, writing in 1925: ‘It seems to me that the most proper place for these portraits to be is in Worcester.... [S]ince 1731 your family has been most prominent not only in Worcester, but all through Worcester County, including Woodstock, which once was a part of Worcester County...If you can give the two portraits which you own to the Society I am sure it will always be a delight to you.’⁵ The donor, who kept the portraits in storage after she had inherited them, apparently agreed, and the self-portrait of one of America’s most significant early provincial painters, along with that of his wife, was given to the American Antiquarian Society.

¹ For more on Winthrop Chandler, see Nina Fletcher Little, ‘Winthrop Chandler,’ Art in America 35 (April 1947): 75-166. Regarding Chandler’s artistic training, the New England Historical and Genealogical Register stated that he ‘studied the art in Boston’ (October 1879: 381), and Little maintains that there was a ‘possible apprenticeship of seven years in Boston’ (145). However, no definitive evidence that Chandler studied painting has been found.

² Little, ‘Winthrop Chandler,’ 145.

³ Massachusetts Spy, August 19, 1790.

⁴ Mary Gleason Chandler Stark to Clarence Bowen, May 25, 1916, AAS Archives. This letter establishes a provenance that appears to be at odds with the one published by Little in 1957. Stark states in her letter: ‘Harriet Rose Chandler gave them to me a short time before she died.’ Harriet Rose Chandler was the wife of Samuel Chandler (1812-71), the artist’s grandson.

⁵ Bowen to Mrs. Arthur J. Hillman, July 22, 1925, AAS Archives.