

JOHN ENDECOTT (1589-1665), 1802
Michele Felice Corné (c. 1752-1845)
after c. 1665 portrait by an unknown artist
24 x 18 (60.960 x 45.720)
oil on canvas
Bequest of William Bentley, 1819
Weis 50
Hewes Number: 42

Ex. Coll.: Commissioned by the donor, 1802.

Exhibitions:

1804, Independence Day Celebration, Meeting House, Salem, Massachusetts.

Endecott, who first served as governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1644, was born in Clagford, Devonshire, England, and, against the desires of his wealthy family, followed Puritan religious doctrine. In March 1628, he was one of six 'religious persons' to be issued a patent for American settlement from the Plymouth Council in England. Even before the patent was granted, Endecott sailed for North America with a small group of colonists and arrived at Salem in September of 1628.¹

Although John Winthrop (cat. #153) is recognized as the first governor of the colony, Endecott managed the affairs of the settlement until Winthrop's arrival in 1630 with a larger group of colonists. Endecott oversaw the clearing of land and helped establish a church that, like the one founded by the Pilgrims at Plymouth, was separate from the Church of England. Endecott devoted his entire life to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, serving at various times as governor and deputy governor. In addition, he was a member of the committee that formed Harvard College and an overseer of its first commencement. Later in life, his intolerance for other religions led to his violent persecution of the Quakers.

This portrait is a copy of a c. 1665 image that was passed down in the Endecott family until it was willed to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1937.² Because of Endecott's importance to colonial settlement and the large number of his descendants, the original portrait was copied many times and at least twenty-three versions are known.³

Over one hundred years after the portrait was painted, the Reverend William Bentley (cat. #8) of Salem viewed the damaged and worn original while visiting the Endecott family in Danvers, Massachusetts. He wrote in his diary that he 'saw the old family picture of J. Endecott.

Copies have been taken. One I have seen in the Senate Chamber & another at Col. Pickman's, Salem. It is hardly to be discovered. The face is the only part which is not entirely gone. The canvas is chiefly bare.’⁴ Five years later, Bentley saw the original again and wrote, ‘The old picture grows dimmer by the smoak [sic].’⁵

Before the Endecott portrait was lost to the ravages of time, Bentley decided to commission a copy for himself. He hired the Italian painter Michele Felice Corné, who was living in Salem, to do the work. ‘Mr. Corné of Naples, an Italian Painter in the Town...rode with me to the estate of Gov. Endicott [sic] to see whether he could preserve a likeness from the family picture of that venerable Puritan.’⁶ Bentley borrowed the original canvas in August 1802⁷ and in mid-October paid Corné \$13.00 for the completed copy.⁸

Corné was born in Elba, Italy, and arrived in Salem in 1799. There he painted ship portraits for local mariners, did some decorative painting, and earned additional funds by taking on pupils. Corné became famous as a scene painter and Bentley paid a fee of twenty-five cents in 1809 to view Corné's panorama of the Bay of Naples.⁹ Corné completed another commission for Bentley, a copy of a portrait of John Leverett (cat. #73), before he left Salem for Boston in 1806.¹⁰

¹ Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. ‘Endecott, John.’ For additional biography, see Lawrence Shaw Mayo, John Endecott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

² The c. 1665 portrait is illustrated in Louisa Dresser, XVIIth Century Painting in New England (Worcester: Worcester Art Museum, 1935), opp. 77.

³ These versions are listed in William C. Endicott, Memoir of Samuel Endicott (Boston: privately printed, 1924), 191-202.

⁴ William Bentley Diary, September 21, 1796, William Bentley Papers, 1666-1819, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

⁵ William Bentley Diary, October 24, 1801.

⁶ William Bentley Diary, July 24, 1802.

⁷ ‘I went up to Endicott's farm to borrow the portrait of the Governor from his descendant. The favor was granted.’ William Bentley Diary, August 11, 1802.

⁸ William Bentley Daybook, October 12, 1802, vol. 4, p. 27, William Bentley Papers, 1666-1819, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection. A week later, on October 19, Bentley paid the Salem woodcarver

Samuel McIntire (1757-1811) to carve a frame for the Endecott copy.

⁹ William Bentley Book Accounts, December 1, 1809, vol. 5, p. 15, William Bentley Papers, 1666-1819, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

¹⁰ For information on Corné, see Philip Smith and Nina Fletcher Little, Michele Felice Corné (Salem: Peabody Museum, 1972).