

EDWARD DILLINGHAM BANGS (1790-1838), 1827

Chester Harding (1792-1866)

oil on canvas

30 x 25 (76.2 x 63.5)

Bequest of Edward Dillingham Bangs, 1870

Weis #6

Hewes Number: 5

Ex. Coll.: sitter, willed to his wife Mary Grosvenor Bangs for her lifetime, then to the American Antiquarian Society.

Publications:

Dean Dudley, The Bangs Family in America (Montrose, Massachusetts: self published, 1896):48.

Leah Lipton, A Truthful Likeness, Chester Harding and his Portraits (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, 1985): 136.

A prominent citizen of Worcester, Edward Dillingham Bangs was an early member of the American Antiquarian Society, elected in 1819 and serving as councillor until his death. He studied law with his father, Judge Edward Bangs (1756-1818), and was himself admitted to the bar in 1813. He practiced law in Worcester and served as editor of the National Aegis. He was an ardent Jeffersonian Republican and wrote political editorials for several local anti-Federalist newspapers. His interest in politics and support of the Republican Party led to his appointment as Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1824, necessitating a move from Worcester to Boston. He held the position of Secretary for eleven years and, while in office, was awarded an honorary A.M. from Harvard College in 1827.

Copies of Bangs's speeches and many of his personal papers are housed at the American Antiquarian Society, among them his diary and correspondence from his years as Secretary of the Commonwealth.¹ His personal library was dispersed after his death, but several volumes in the Society's collection still bear his bookplate, including William Charles White's play Orlando, Or Parental Persecution (1797), and Thomas Jefferson Randolph's Memoir, Correspondence and Miscellanies From the Papers of Thomas Jefferson (1830). His AAS obituary published in 1838 noted his contributions: 'Edward D. Bangs, Esq., one of the founders in the laborious

¹ See Bangs Family Papers, 1760-1866, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

arrangements following its organization, always devoted to the promotion of its objects, was lately an active and useful member of the board.'²

Bangs was a young professional when he commissioned this portrait. In his diary he recorded on October 3, 1827, 'Commenced sitting to Harding for my picture.'³ Chester Harding, who had returned from Europe the previous year, set up a studio at 22 School Street in Boston and was quickly becoming the most fashionable portrait painter in the city. In October he completed a well-received portrait of President John Quincy Adams; it is logical that Bangs, himself an important state official, would choose Harding to paint his own portrait. The likeness was described as good and, when compared to a written description of Bangs seems to capture the man accurately: 'He...was a plain man, rather below middle stature, stout, thick-set, with sallow complexion, eyes slightly protruding, rather heavy and with an expression of sadness.'⁴

² Levi Lincoln, Reminiscences of the Original Associates of the Worcester Fire Society (Worcester: Edward R. Fiske, 1862): 28.

³ Edward D. Bangs, Diary and Memoranda Book, October 3, 1827, Bangs Family Papers.

⁴ Lincoln, Reminiscences of the Original Associates of the Worcester Fire Society, 28.