

REBECCA FAULKNER FOSTER (1761-1834), c. 1830

Eliza Goodridge (1798-1882)

watercolor on ivory

3 5/8 x 2 1/4 (9.2075 x 5.7150)

Bequest of Harriet E. Clarke, 1944

Weis 59

Hewes Number: 51

Ex. Coll.: sitter, probably to her daughter Sophia Dwight Foster Burnside (1787-1871), through the family to her grandniece, the donor.

Rebecca Faulkner was born in Acton, Massachusetts, and in 1783, at the age of twenty-one, married Dwight Foster (1757-1823). Foster, who had graduated from Brown in 1774, was admitted to the bar in 1778 and established his law practice in Brookfield, Massachusetts. Rebecca Foster was the mother of four children, Pamela (1784-1807), Algernon Sidney (1785-1823), Sophia Dwight (1787-1872?), and Alfred Dwight (1800-52). By the time of their marriage, Dwight Foster was already serving as a justice of the peace. During his long career, Foster held many elected offices in Worcester County, serving as sheriff, a justice of the Court of Common Pleas. He served two terms in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1791-92 and 1808-9. Between these terms in Boston, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives (1793-1800) and the Senate (1800-3).¹

During her husband's absence in Washington, D. C., Rebecca Faulkner Foster maintained an extensive correspondence with him in which she told him of the health of their children, social events in Worcester, and details of her household management and expenses.² A letter written in 1803, near the end of her husband's term in the United States Senate, Rebecca Faulkner Foster, who had remained in Brookfield with four small children, expressed her anticipation of his return home. 'I rejoice the time draws nigh you have fixed upon to quit the Public walks of life and retire to your little family circle - ten long winters have rolled away in dull repetition. I hope we shall be permitted to have the remainder of our winters together in peaceful and happy retirement.'³

Dwight Foster returned to Brookfield and continued to be actively involved in public service on a local level until around 1820. After her husband's death in 1828, Rebecca Faulkner Foster lived in Worcester with her youngest daughter Sarah Dwight Foster Burnside (cat. #16).⁴ This miniature was probably painted toward the end of her life when she was living with the

Burnsides. When Rebecca Faulkner Foster died in 1834, at the age of seventy-two, her son-in-law wrote in his diary, 'This day, at 15 minutes past 11 Mrs. Foster, our dear and venerable Mother breathed her last, surrounded by her children. Her struggle with nature was long and distressing in the extreme, but she has gone to her eternal rest.'⁵

¹ For additional biographical information on Dwight Foster see Frederick Clifton Pierce, Foster Genealogy (Chicago: W. B. Conkley, Co., 1899): 222.

² These letters, along with Dwight Foster's political correspondence featuring discussions of national trade issues, foreign affairs, and aspects of the events surrounding the Louisiana Purchase, are all preserved in the manuscript collection of the American Antiquarian Society. In 1813 he became a member of the American Antiquarian Society, and his descendants later donated important pamphlets from his personal library, including Samuel Hopkins's Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans (1776) and Fisher Ames's An Oration on the Sublime Virtues of General George Washington (1800). Dwight Foster Correspondence, Rebecca Faulkner Foster Correspondence, Foster Family Papers, 1740-1884, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

³ Rebecca Faulkner Foster to Dwight Foster, January 30, 1803, Foster Family Papers.

⁴ Before 1821, Sarah Dwight Foster Burnside maintained a weekly correspondence with her mother, which is preserved in the American Antiquarian Society's Foster Family Papers.

⁵ Samuel M'Gregore Burnside Diary, May 9, 1834, Samuel M'Gregore Burnside Papers, 1783-1850. American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection. Burnside describes Foster's funeral in his entry for May 12, 1834.