

REBECCA FAULKNER FOSTER (1832-1927), 1852

Richard Morell Staigg (1817-1881)

watercolor on ivory

4 1/4 x 3 3/8 (10.7950 x 8.5725)

signed l.l., above shoulder, 'Staigg 1852'

Bequest of Dwight Foster Dunn, 1937

Weis 33

Hewes Number: 52

Ex. Coll.: commissioned by the sitter's sister Mary Stiles Foster (Dunn) (1830-1900), to her son the donor.

Rebecca Faulkner Foster was the youngest child of Alfred Dwight Foster (1800-52) and Lydia Stiles Foster (cat. #49). She and her older siblings, Dwight and Mary (cat. #53) grew up in Worcester. The family traveled extensively. During 1850, the family was journeying through the South visiting Richmond, Virginia, Charleston, South Carolina, New Orleans, Louisiana, Mobile, Alabama, and Savannah, Georgia. Her older Mary described some of their adventures in letters home to a friend, including a story about their stay in Mobile in March 1850: '[A]fter I was arrayed in my 'robe de nuit' - I discovered on the wall - a Centipede - I had no weapons to rise, and called to 'Becca in our parlor adjoining to bring me something with which to kill it. She could not get anything until its many legs had conveyed it under the wardrobe. Hetty found, on her return, Becca standing on the parlor sofa, feet and all, while I was sailing round half insane between my stomach ache and the recollections of the awful stories we had heard that day of the poisonous nature of centipedes.... After the commotion had somewhat subsided we discovered another and so went to bed with stockings and shoes on and I had my suspicions that the others did not undress at all.'¹ The sisters survived the journey and returned to Worcester at the end of the year.

This miniature depicting Rebecca at age twenty, was commissioned by her older sister Mary two years after the southern trip. Mary paid the English artist Richard M. Staigg \$100 for the portrait.² The miniature is inscribed with the date 1852. In August of that year the girls' father died suddenly and they each inherited a considerable portion of his estate. Mary may have been inspired to commission the miniature based on the death of her father or due to her sister's upcoming marriage. In May 1853, Rebecca left the Foster household to marry Dr. Henry Clarke (1824-80), who established a large medical practice in Worcester.³

The artist Richard M. Staigg, who was born in Leeds, England, came to the United States in 1831. He studied the art of miniature painting with Jane Stuart (1812-88) and eventually settled in Newport, Rhode Island. He moved to Boston in 1841 and exhibited his work at the Boston Athenaeum. Staigg quickly gained recognition for his flattering likenesses and included prominent Massachusetts politicians and members of Boston's social elite among his patrons. In 1852, shortly after completing this portrait of Rebecca Faulkner Foster, Staigg moved to New York City.⁴

¹ Mary Stiles Foster to Sarah Bruce Hill, March 19, 1850, Foster Family Papers 1740-1884, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

² Label on verso, in hand of Mary Stiles Foster: 'Painted by Staigg for her sister Mary S. Foster and paid for by her \$100.'

³ Rufus Woodward, 'Dr. Henry Clarke,' Boston Medical and Surgical Journal (May 13, 1880), American Antiquarian Society Newsclipping File. Although Dr. Clarke never became a member of the American Antiquarian Society, he and his wife were generous donors of books and periodicals to the Society's library between 1877 and 1905. See Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society (October 1877): 90; 11 (October 1896): 239; 13 (April 1899): 56; and 17 (October 1905): 193.

⁴ Dale T. Johnson, American Portrait Miniatures in the Manney Collection (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990), 204-5.