

THE FOSTER CHILDREN, 1838
Eliza Goodridge (1798-1882)
watercolor on ivory
4 x 3 3/8 (10.1600 x 8.5725)
Bequest of Dwight Foster Dunn, 1937
Weis 53
Hewes Number: 53

Ex. Coll.: given by the artist in 1838 to Lydia Stiles Foster, to her daughter Mary Stiles Foster Dunn on January 1, 1883, to her son the donor on his twenty-first birthday, December 11, 1886.

Exhibitions:

1957, 'New England Miniatures,' Museum of Fine Arts Boston, no. 62.
1990, 'Tokens of Affection: The Portrait Miniature in America,' Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Publications:

Louisa Dresser, 'Portraits Owned by the American Antiquarian Society,' The Magazine Antiques 95 (November 1969): 726.

This remarkable miniature depicts the three children of Alfred Dwight Foster (1800-52) and his wife Lydia Stiles Foster (cat. #49) of Worcester, Massachusetts. The children, Dwight (1828-1884), Mary (1830-1900), and Rebecca (1832-1927), are posed in an interior with their parents in the background. Rebecca, the youngest child, arranges flowers from her mother's garden in a vase while her older siblings are reading books.

In adulthood, Dwight Foster was a Yale graduate (1848), who was admitted to the bar in Massachusetts the following year. He rose to associate justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court (1866-69). Elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society in 1856, he served twice on the Council, 1856-63 and 1880-84. Mary married the Reverend Robinson Dunn in 1855 and lived in Worcester. A second miniature of Rebecca (cat. #52) depicts her just before her 1853 marriage to Dr. Henry Clarke of Worcester.¹

The miniature of the Foster children was a gift from the artist to her friend, Lydia Stiles Foster. In the accompanying note Goodridge describes it as an anniversary present. 'Will you, my good friend, on this tenth anniversary of your wedding accept this picture as an expression of the obligation I feel for the many favors you have conferred and are continually conferring on me? Now do not, I beseech you, overwhelm me still deeper with debts I can never cancel by offering

me anything in return. I have already received an ox for the egg. ...[W]hen the second tenth anniversary shall arrive, may it find you possessed of all you now enjoy, may the legitimate fruits of such a period of time wisely spent be added to them and may the originals of the picture, then beginning to take their place in the busy scenes of life (God willing), be to you all the fond Christian parent can desire.'²

The interior details captured in the miniature reveal Goodridge's awareness of life in the Foster household in which she had been a frequent visitor. She had ample opportunity to study the Foster children in the summer of 1836 when she took care of them while their parents traveled in Pennsylvania and Ohio.³ The miniature was a treasured family heirloom and was passed carefully through the generations until it was presented to the American Antiquarian Society in 1937.

¹ The Foster Family Papers 1740-1884, and Robinson Potter Dunn Papers 1825-1897, include their adult correspondence and personal papers. American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

² Eliza Goodridge to Lydia Stiles Foster, February 14, 1838, Foster Family Papers.

³ Alfred Dwight Foster to Mary Stiles, May 15, 1836, Foster Family Papers. Lydia Stiles Foster's postscript to this letter reads: 'Give the children a kiss and tell them to be good and mind Miss Goodridge.'