

ELLIS GRAY (1715-53), c. 1758  
Joseph Badger (1708-65)  
after his c. 1750 portrait of Gray  
oil on canvas  
30 x 25 1/2 (76.20 x 64.77)  
Bequest of William Bentley, 1819  
Weis 63  
Hewes Number: 61

Ex. Coll.: 'Mr. Gray' (probably a descendant); in 1819 to the donor.

Ellis Gray, the son of a wealthy Boston rope manufacturer, graduated from Harvard College in 1734 and took the M.A. in 1737. He was ordained as the second minister of the New Brick Church in Boston—a post he retained until his death at the age of thirty-seven--and also served as chaplain of the Colonial House of Representatives. When Gray died suddenly of a stroke, he was greatly mourned in the Boston area. His obituary described him as having a 'manly Seriousness, and a deep Sense of Religion; a Singular Modesty and Innocence of Manner, a Taste for the most solid and useful Branches of Literature; a Remarkable Strength of Memory, and a peculiar Relish of divine Knowledge.' He was a conservative minister, who was remembered for his 'manner of Preaching that discovered at once the Solidity of his Judgment and the Warmth of his Heart.'<sup>1</sup> Two published sermons, dated 1741 and 1742, are preserved in the American Antiquarian Society's imprint collection.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph Badger, a house and sign painter who also worked as a glazier, began painting portraits in 1740. He took advantage of a gap left in the Boston portrait market by the deaths of John Smibert (1688-1751) and Peter Pelham (d. 1751) and was the most fashionable painter in Boston until the rise of John Singleton Copley (1738-1815). Badger painted five portraits of the Reverend Ellis Gray, four of which, including the American Antiquarian Society's image, were copied from a likeness he had made of Gray about 1750.<sup>3</sup> The copies were all made after Gray's death and were commissioned by members of the Gray family, through which they descended into the nineteenth century.

In 1808 the Salem minister William Bentley (cat. 8) began to search for a portrait of Gray to add to his collection of images of New England dignitaries. In June he noted in his diary that 'Mrs. Thayer, daughter of Rev'd Jackson of Brook[lyn] [has] a painting of Rev'd Mr. Gray, one

of the ministers of New Brick Church, Boston. Rev'd Mr. Cary of Newburyport has another painting of the same person, both by Badger.'<sup>4</sup> The Thayer picture had once belonged to Bentley's maternal grandfather William Paine (d. 1786), who was a good friend of Gray.

In 1819 one of Bentley's nephews sent him this Badger copy as a gift from a 'Mr. Gray.'<sup>5</sup> In recording this gift in his diary, Bentley gave the reasons for his wish to add Gray's portrait to his collection: 'The deep interest I take in this painting is from the intimate friendship between him & the Grandfather who gave me my education, from the affectionate conduct of his Son who was in the offices of public trust in Boston while I was in the public schools, & from the bounty of his G[rand]son.... There is a kind of Correspondence of incidence in the history of the church to which he belonged and my Own. They had their origins in about the same time [and] the first minister of both died about the same time.'<sup>6</sup> As Bentley died a month after recording this entry, the Gray portrait was one of the last he acquired.

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<sup>1</sup> Boston Gazette, January 16, 1753.

<sup>2</sup> Gray, The Design of the Institution of the Gospel Ministry...A Sermon Preach'd on Lord's Day Morning, September 27, 1741 (Boston: G. Rogers for M. Dennis, 1741), and The Fidelity of Ministers to Themselves, and to the Flock of God, Consider'd and Enforc'd. A Sermon Preached at the Ordination of the Reverend Mr. Thaddeus Maccarty to the Pastoral Office...Nov. 3, 1742 (Boston: G. Rogers for M. Dennis, 1742).

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Park, 'Joseph Badger,' Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society 51 (December 1917): 173. Park is the most complete source for information on Badger. For an illustration of the c. 1750 portrait, now in the collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society, see Sibley's Harvard Graduates, s.v. 'Gray, Ellis.'

<sup>4</sup> William Bentley Diary, June 28, 1808, William Bentley Papers, 1666-1819, AAS Manuscript Collection.

<sup>5</sup> Bentley Diary, November 18, 1819. Bentley noted, 'Mr. Gray would receive nothing for the painting.'

<sup>6</sup> Bentley Diary, November 18, 1819.