

JOHN LEVERETT (c. 1616-79), 1803
Michele Felice Corné (c. 1752-1845)
after original by unknown artist, possibly Sir Peter Lely
oil on canvas
20 1/2 x 15 (52.07 x 38.10)
Bequest of William Bentley, 1819
Weis 72
Hewes Number: 73

Ex. Coll.: Commissioned by the donor, 1803.

Exhibitions:

1804, Independence Day Celebration, Meeting House, Salem, Massachusetts.

John Leverett, who was born in Lincolnshire, England, immigrated with his wife and children in 1633 to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, where he had secured a parcel of land along Muscongus Bay, in what is now Maine. In Boston he became a merchant and importer of European goods. He returned to Lincolnshire in 1644 to fight in the English Civil War but later came back to Boston to resume his business and pursue a career in politics. From 1651 to 1653 he served as a delegate to the General Court and was a Boston selectman. Leverett also participated in colonial military affairs as a member of Boston's Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company from 1639 until 1671. In 1664 he was appointed a major general.¹

During his political career Leverett served as speaker of the House and was often a member of the governor's council. In 1671 he was appointed lieutenant governor, and two years later he became the governor. As governor during King Philip's War, he is credited with successfully bringing the year-long conflict to a decisive end in 1676.²

In 1798 the Reverend William Bentley of Salem (cat. 8) sought to add Leverett's likeness to his collection of portraits of early governors of Massachusetts.³ A descendent of Leverett owned a portrait that was said to have been painted by Sir Peter Lely (1618-80).⁴ Although Bentley was unable to acquire the portrait, he commissioned this copy five years later.

The Italian painter Michele Felice Corné had previously copied a portrait of John Endecott (cat. 42) for Bentley, who negotiated with him again for the Leverett copy. In February 1803 Bentley wrote: '[Was] Lent 3/4 Portrait of Gov. Leverett 1673-78, received from Mr. Treadwell of Ipswich, to Michael [sic] Corne to be copied.'⁵ Three months later Bentley paid

Corné six dollars for the completed copy.⁶ The following year, 1804, Bentley proudly hung his copies of Leverett and Endecott, along with several prints he owned of other prominent New Englanders, in a patriotic display at the Salem Meeting House to mark Independence Day.⁷

¹ Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. 'Leverett, John.' For additional biographical information on Leverett, see Charles E. Leverett, A Memoir of Sir John Leverett (Boston: Crosby, Nichols & Co., 1856).

² Catalogue of Portraits in the Essex Institute (Salem, Mass.: Essex Institute, 1936), 117.

³ William Bentley Diary, April 28, 1798, William Bentley Papers, 1666-1819, AAS Manuscript Collection.

⁴ The original painting, now in the collection of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, is illustrated in Windows on the Past: Portraits at the Essex Institute (Salem, Mass.: Essex Institute, 1981), 48.

⁵ William Bentley Book Accounts, February 15, 1803, Bentley Papers.

⁶ Bentley Book Accounts, April 15, 1803. Bentley wrote: 'April 15. Paid Michael Corne six dollars for copying a painting of Gov. Leveret [sic], 6.00.' According to his accounts, Bentley retained the original for an additional month, not returning it to Treadwell until May 17, when he noted: 'Returned to Jacob Treadwell, by Nathaniel Harris the Portrait of Gov. Leveret receive 15 February last.'

⁷ Bentley Diary, July 4, 1804.