

THADDEUS MACCARTY (1721-84), 18th century

Anonymous

oil on canvas

30 x 24 3/4 (76.20 x 62.8650)

Bequest of Dwight Foster Dunn, 1937

Weis 74

Hewes Number: 75

Ex Coll.: Maccarty's descendants, given to the American Antiquarian Society by sitters great, great granddaughter Mrs. Harry K. Newcomb in 1867, returned to the family at the request of her niece Mary Foster Dunn in 1878, to her son, the donor.

Publications:

Clifford K. Shipton, Sibleys Harvard Graduates 10 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1958): opp. 384.

Thaddeus Maccarty, the son of a Boston sea captain, graduated from Harvard College in 1739, and was ordained in Kingston, Massachusetts, in 1742. He had a falling out with members of his congregation there and was dismissed in 1745.¹ Two years later, he became the minister of the First Church in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he remained for the rest of his life. Although his preaching was never considered brilliant or intellectual, Maccarty earned a reputation for his enthusiastic descriptions of hell and damnation, and his daylong Sunday discourses on the evils of man. He was described by a contemporary as 'a man tall of stature, slender of habit, with a black penetrating eye. As a publik preacher he was solemn, loud, searching and rousing.'²

During the Revolutionary War, Maccarty attempted to keep politics out of his pulpit. Unlike other area clergy who fully supported the Loyalist cause and abandoned their congregations for the safety of Canada, Maccarty remained in Worcester and tried to balance the issues, although he clearly had patriotic feelings. 'When a post rider rode into Worcester on a hot day in July 1776, bearing the news that the Declaration of Independence had been signed, he was summarily halted by a tall, slender man with dark, piercing eyes. The man was Rev. Thaddeus Maccarty Isaiah Thomas, at the time the post master, was in the little throng that had collected in anticipation of the news and it was Mr. Thomas, at the command of the clergyman, who mounted the porch of Old South Church and read the message that thrilled the city.'³

Because Worcester was the county seat, Maccarty was often called upon to preach at public events, such as the 1778 execution of Bathsheba Spooner (1746-78) and her three accomplices, for the murder of Joshua Spooner, Bathsheba's husband. The Spooner case was one

of the most sensational court cases in New England as it involved not only a crime of passion, but, because of Bathsheba's alleged support of the British cause, pitted Loyalists and Patriots against one another. Spooner was prominent socially and surprised the citizens of Worcester with her calm acceptance of her fate. Maccarty recalled, 'I accompanied her in a carriage to the place of execution; she appeared undismayed and unaffrightened.... At length we came in sight of the gallows. I asked her if the sight did not strike her? She answered not at all any more than any other subject. Her constitutional politeness remained.'⁴ Maccarty preached a sermon on the death of Spooner that, along with his other published writings, is preserved in the American Antiquarian Society's imprint collection.

This portrait of Maccarty by an unknown painter remained with the minister's descendants into the nineteenth century. In 1867, heavily overpainted and damaged, it was given to the American Antiquarian Society by the sitter's great-great-granddaughter. Eleven years later, the family requested the return of the portrait stating, 'The portrait is of no value as a painting but it is the only likeness of Maccarty which exists and it would be very agreeable to us if it could be returned to our family.'⁵ The Society complied with the request. In 1935 the next generation bequeathed the portrait back to the American Antiquarian Society along with a collection of Thaddeus Maccarty's personal papers.⁶

¹ William B. Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1859): 423-25. The Rev. Ellis Gray (cat. #61) preached at Maccarty's ordination, November 3, 1742. The Fidelity of Ministers to Themselves, and to the Flock of God, Consider'd and Enforc'd (Boston: printed by G. Rogers for M. Dennis, 1742)

² Zephaniah Willis, quoted in Shipton, Sibley's Harvard Graduates (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1958)10: 380.

³ 'Old Bible Given to South Church,' Worcester Sunday Telegram, April 18, 1926, American Antiquarian Society Newsclipping File.

⁴ Sibley's Harvard Graduates, 385. For a complete analysis of the Spooner case, see Chandler Bullock, 'The Bathsheba Spooner Murder Case,' paper read before the Worcester Historical Society, April 14, 1939. The Spooner verdict has the distinction of being the only execution in Worcester County of four individuals for a single crime. For a more recent account of the case, see Deborah Navas, Murdered by his Wife (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

⁵ Mary Foster Dunn to Samuel Foster Haven, August 19, 1878, American Antiquarian Society Archives.

⁶ Maccarty Family Papers, 1742-1863, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.