

INCREASE MATHER (1639-1723), c. 1720

Anonymous

oil on canvas

30 x 25 (76.20 x 63.50)

Gift of Hannah Mather Crocker, 1815

Weis 79

Hewes Number: 80

Ex. Coll.: Mather family; to the sitter's great-granddaughter, the donor.

Exhibitions:

1864, 'National Sailors' Fair,' Boston Athenaeum, no. 209.

Publications:

Kenneth Murdock, Portraits of Increase Mather (Cleveland, Ohio: privately published, 1924), 46-50, plate 8.

E. C. Stedman and E. M. Hutchinson, A Library of American Literature, 11 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1888-90), 2: 76.

Justin Winsor, Memorial History of Boston, 4 vols. (Boston: Ticknor and Co., 1880), 1: 587.

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INCREASE MATHER (1639-1723), 1927

Anonymous

after John van der Spriett

oil on canvas

50 x 39 7/8 (127.00 x 101.28)

Bequest of Henry Winchester Cunningham, 1930

Weis 80

Ex. Coll.: Commissioned by the donor, 1927.

The eminent Congregational clergyman and president of Harvard College Increase Mather was the son of Richard Mather (cats. 82-83) and father of three sons, including Cotton (cats. 78-79). He graduated from Harvard in 1656 and, after travelling abroad to visit family in England and Ireland, was ordained in 1664 as the minister of Boston's Second Church. Mather held considerable power in Boston and worked diligently for the continuance of the royal charter for Massachusetts, often travelling to England to meet with Charles II, and later with James II, to plead for support of the colony.¹

In 1685, after ten years of involvement with Harvard as it struggled to survive the troubled tenure of President Leonard Hoar, a student boycott, and the impact of King Philip's War, Mather became its first American-born president. His vision for reinvigorating Harvard was

influenced by the Dutch model of a humanist university.² As president of Harvard until 1701, he oversaw its revival and its growth in number of matriculants and recognized fields of study. As a Puritan clergyman Mather had many opportunities to speak out on the issues of the day, and his opinions were published in volumes of sermons and essays. They include A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New England (1675), theological treatises such as An Arrow Against Profane and Promiscuous Dancing (1684) and A Discourse Proving that the Christian Religion is the only True Religion (1702), and Cases of Conscience Concerning Witchcraft (1692), which was credited with calming the persecution of individuals accused of witchcraft in Salem and Boston.³ Many of Increase Mather's personal papers, including his correspondence and diaries from 1664 to 1702, are preserved in the manuscript collection of the American Antiquarian Society.⁴

According to family tradition, the portrait of Increase Mather (cat. 80) was made in Boston when he was an elderly man.⁵ It was retained by the family and was seen in 1804 by the Salem minister William Bentley (cat. 8) hanging in the Cambridge home of one of Mather's descendants. Bentley was interested in the Mather family library, which was decorated with portraits of all the famous Mather men. He recorded the condition of each of these portraits in his diary, noting: 'That of Increase, in his old age, is a good picture & was called a likeness.'⁶ In 1814 the founder of the American Antiquarian Society, Isaiah Thomas, Sr. (cat. 123 et seq.), purchased a large collection of Mather family books and papers from a great-granddaughter of Increase Mather, who at the same time donated his portrait and that of his son Samuel, as well as images of Richard, Cotton, and his son Samuel (cats. 79, 82, 84-85) to the Society.

The second portrait is a twentieth-century copy, after a 1688 portrait of Increase Mather painted by John van der Spriett in England. In 1692 Mather returned to Boston with the original portrait, and in 1798 it was given by his great-granddaughter to the Massachusetts Historical Society.⁷ In 1927 Henry W. Cunningham (cat. 36) commissioned an unknown artist to make a copy of the van der Spriett portrait for his own collection. The copy hung in the library of Cunningham's home in Boston until it was bequeathed to the American Antiquarian Society in 1930.

¹ For biographical information on Mather, see William Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit, 9 vols. (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1859), 1: 151-59; John Langdon Sibley, Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Harvard University, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Charles William Sever, 1873), 1: 410-70; and Michael G. Hall, The Last American Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988).

² Rick Kennedy and Thomas Knoles, 'Increase Mather's "Catechismus Logicus": An Analysis of the Role of a Ramist Catechism,' Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 109 (1999): 164-65.

³ For a complete list of Mather's writings, see Sibley, Biographical Sketches, 1: 438-70.

⁴ Mather Family Papers, 1613-1819, AAS Manuscript Collection.

⁵ Kenneth Murdock, Portraits of Increase Mather (Cleveland, Ohio: privately printed, 1924), 46.

⁶ William Bentley Diary, August 16, 1894, William Bentley Papers, 1666-1819, AAS Manuscript Collection.

⁷ The portrait was given to the Massachusetts Historical Society by Hannah Mather Crocker (1752-1829), who later gave AAS the bust-length portrait of Increase Mather (cat. 80). The 1688 portrait is illustrated in Portraits in the Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1988), 68, plate 17.