

SAMUEL MATHER (1706-85), c. 1750

John Greenwood (1727-92)

oil on canvas

32 1/4 x 27 1/2 (81.92 x 69.85)

Gift of Hannah Mather Crocker, 1815

Weis 84

Hewes Number: 85

Ex. Coll.: Sitter; to his daughter, the donor.

Exhibitions:

1864, 'National Sailors' Fair,' Boston Athenaeum, no. 210, as 'Rev. Samuel Mather of Boston.'

1971, 'Early American Paintings from the Collections of the Worcester Art Museum and the American Antiquarian Society,' Worcester Art Museum.

Publications:

Sibley's Harvard Graduates, s.v. 'Mather, Samuel.'

Samuel Mather, the son of Cotton Mather (cats. 78-79), has the distinction of being the 'last of the Mather dynasty in the Boston pulpits.' After his graduation from Harvard College in 1723, Mather preached at Castle William in Boston Harbor until his appointment as minister of the Second Church in Boston in 1732. Although he was dismissed from that post for improper conduct in 1741, a biographer noted that he was 'respected as a scholar, minister, and owner of a great library of books and manuscripts[;] he had neither wide public influence nor as great power as his ancestors.' After leaving the Second Church, he formed the Tenth Congregational Society, which he led until his death.¹

Like his father and uncles, Samuel Mather published sermons and other works, among them a biography of his father, Life of the Very Reverend and Learned Cotton Mather (1729). Samuel inherited large portions of the libraries of his father and grandfather, and he used this material as reference for his own preaching and writing. Drafts of many of his sermons and essays are in the manuscript collection of the American Antiquarian Society.² In 1814 part of the Mather family library, described by William Bentley (cat. 8) as 'once the largest private Library in America,'³ was purchased by the founder of the American Antiquarian Society, Isaiah Thomas, Sr. (cat. 123 et seq.). The theological volumes, sermons, poems, and religious tracts it contains continue to be shelved together at the Society.⁴

This portrait of Samuel Mather was given to the Society at the time that Thomas purchased the family library.⁵ It was painted by John Greenwood, a young Boston painter who had apprenticed as an engraver and started painting portraits about 1742. Early in his career, Greenwood painted merchants, ministers, and wealthy Boston matrons. He left Boston in 1752, at the age of twenty-five, and travelled extensively in Surinam, Holland, and England.⁶

¹ Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. 'Mather, Samuel.'

² Mather Family Papers, 1613-1819, AAS Manuscript Collection.

³ William Bentley Diary, August 16, 1804, William Bentley Papers, 1666-1819, AAS Manuscript Collection.

⁴ J. H. Tuttle, 'The Libraries of the Mathers,' Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 20 (April 1910): 269-356.

⁵ The portrait has been copied at least twice. A nineteenth-century copy is owned by the Antiquarian and Landmark Society of Hartford, Connecticut. In 1907 the portrait was copied by Mrs. Harry Thompson of Paris for Alonzo C. Mather of Buffalo, New York.

⁶ For more on Greenwood see Alan Burroughs, John Greenwood in America (Andover, Mass.: Addison Gallery, 1943).