

JOHN MOORE, JR. (b. c. 1800), 1826

William P. Codman (c. 1798-1831)

oil on canvas

26 x 21 3/4 (66.04 x 55.25)

signed, on verso: 'Wm. P. Codman/Pinxt/1826'

Gift of Martha Jane Brown, Bernice Brown Goldsberry, John J. Goldsberry, Jr., 1974

Hewes Number: 87

Ex. Coll.: Sitter; to his nephew William Brown (1824-92), who brought the painting to Worcester in 1841; through the Brown family to his grandchildren, the donors.

Publications:

'New Accessions,' The Magazine Antiques 108 (September 1975): 342.

John Moore, Jr., was the only son of John Moore, Sr. (1751-1836), a Boston mariner, and his wife, Alice Niles. John Moore, Sr., was born a free black in New York City and moved to Boston as a young man. He supported the patriot cause during the Revolutionary War and, according to family history, fought at the battle of Lexington. After the war, the elder Moore worked as a house servant in Nova Scotia before earning a seaman's certificate. In 1784 he retired from the sea and settled permanently in Boston, where his son John, Jr., was born about 1800.¹

This portrait of John, Jr., in his twenties depicts an obviously successful individual, possibly the same John Moore who listed his occupation as 'barber' in the 'People of Color' section of the 1827 Boston City Directory. The address, on South Russell Street, places Moore's shop in an area of the city largely populated by African Americans.² His choice of profession was not an unusual one for a free black man in the nineteenth century. At that time, 'barbering...was an occupation that provided crucial economic support for many black men.'³ In 1831, shortly after this portrait was painted, John Moore, Jr., became the legal guardian of two young nephews, Fred and William Brown.⁴ They were the children of his sister Alice (1793-1866), whose husband had recently died. Other particulars of the life of John Moore, Jr., including where he lived after 1833, whether he married or had children, and when he died, are not known.

In 1826, the year this portrait was painted, the artist William P. Codman listed himself as a 'portrait painter' in the Boston directories.⁵ Codman was an itinerant artist, who travelled to New Orleans in 1823, advertised in newspapers in Portland, Maine, in 1824, and was in Boston from 1826 to 1831.⁶ He sometimes worked with Charles Codman (c. 1800-42), who may have been his brother. Portraits by William usually depict middle-class men and women, bust length, against a neutral background.⁷

The portrait of Moore passed to his nephew and ward William Brown, who, in 1841, moved with his family to Worcester, Massachusetts, where he worked as an upholsterer and drapery expert. In the twentieth century, his descendants donated Brown's personal and business papers to the American Antiquarian Society. Accompanying the papers was this portrait, which was then believed to depict John Moore, Sr. However, conservation of the canvas in 1975 revealed the date on the verso, and further research indicated that the portrait was of John, Jr., rather than his father, who would have been seventy-five years old in 1826. At the time of its gift to the Society, Marcus McCorison (cat. 76), then director and librarian, described it as 'a wonderfully interesting and valuable addition to known examples of early American portraiture. Appropriately it joins the manuscripts and books of the Brown family.... Taken together all elements constitute an uncommon and historically useful family archive.'⁸

¹ Genealogical Record, Brown Family Papers, 1762-1965, AAS Manuscript Collection. This record lists seven children, with the girls listed first. The lower portion of the page, where John, Jr., is named, is damaged, and his birth date is partially illegible.

² Jesse Chickering, Statistical View of the Population of Massachusetts from 1765-1840 (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1846), and James Oliver Horton, 'Black Activism in Boston, 1830-1860' (Ph. D. diss., Brandeis University, 1973).

³ Jack Salzman et al., Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History, 5 vols. (New York: Simon & Schuster, Macmillan, 1996), 3: 1164. In the Boston city directories from 1830 to 1833, John Moore is listed as a 'hairdresser.'

⁴ Guardianship Papers, Brown Family Papers.

⁵ Boston City Directory (Boston: John H. A. Frost and Charles Stimpson, Jr., 1826), 78. Codman's address is 'rear Eagle Coffee House, Common.'

⁶ See Codman's advertisements in the Portland Advertiser, May 26, 1824, and in the Agricultural Intelligencer and Mechanic Register (Boston), February 18, 1820. In one advertisement he offered to 'paint portraits in an agreeable style for twenty four dollars the pair.'

⁷ The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America, 1564-1860, s.v. 'Codman, William.'

⁸ AAS Press Release, March 26, 1975.