

HENRY KNOX NEWCOMB (1796-1868), c. 1840
MARY STILES NEWCOMB (1807-1872), c. 1840

Eliza Goodridge (1798-1882)
watercolor on ivory
Henry Knox Newcomb: 3 3/4 x 2 7/8 (9.5250 x 7.3025)
Mary Stiles Newcomb: 3 13/16 x 2 7/8 (9.6837 x 7.3025)
Bequest of Dwight Foster Dunn, 1937
Weis 86, 88
Hewes Numbers: 88 & 89

Ex. Coll.: sitters, possibly to Lydia Stiles Foster (cat#), to her grandson, the donor.

Exhibitions:

Mary Stiles Newcomb:
1993, "Classical Taste in America, 1800-1840," Baltimore Museum
of Art.

Publications:

Mary Stiles Newcomb:
Wendy A. Cooper, Classical Taste in America, 1800-1840 (New York: Baltimore Museum of
Art and Abbeville Press, 1993): 218.

Henry Knox Newcomb was a merchant and land speculator who first moved to Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1822. In the 1830s he established an importing business in Key West, Florida, and spent several years travelling between the two cities. In the late 1840s, he disposed of his southern interests and settled permanently in Worcester where he worked as an accountant at the Worcester Bank, served as an officer at the Boston Custom House, and became crier for the county court. Newcomb, who was very active socially in Worcester, was a friend of Christopher Columbus Baldwin (cat. #2) and is mentioned several times in Baldwin's diaries. American Antiquarian Society records indicate that Henry Knox Newcomb gave three 1820s pamphlets featuring Massachusetts sermons to the Society, possibly because of his connection with Baldwin.¹

¹ The pamphlets include sermons by James Jackson (1777-1867), Titus Strong (1787-1855), and Nathaniel Thayer (1769-1840).

Newcomb's contemporaries remembered him as a "man of fine presence, winning in his manner, and of a most social and genial nature, very fond of telling and hearing a good story, and in early life was a great favorite in society. He was most kind-hearted, sympathetic and impulsive, and generous to a fault, and of too sanguine a temperament to be successful as a business man."² Newcomb invested with his brothers in risky land acquisitions and often had to resolve legal problems associated with the actions of his younger brother Francis Dana Newcomb (1802-1872), who was arrested several times for fraud and forgery. His brother's problems put a strain on the finances of Henry and Mary Newcomb and in 1854, Newcomb sent several letters to his brother seeking repayment of a \$5,000 debt.³ Their detailed correspondence as well as Newcomb's account books and business papers are preserved at the American Antiquarian Society.⁴

Another brother, Joseph Warren Newcomb (1804-1874), may have introduced Henry K. Newcomb to Mary Stiles. Joseph worked as an attorney in Templeton, Massachusetts where Mary lived with her aging parents. After the couple's marriage, they lived for six months in Key West, Florida, but eventually returned to Worcester and built a house on Elm Street near the residence of Mary's sister, Lydia Stiles Foster (cat. #49). This miniature was probably painted sometime after the couple's return from the south in June of 1838. The artist, Eliza Goodridge, had painted Mary's portrait twice before her marriage (cats. #111, 112) and repeated several elements in this image that she had used in an earlier portrait, including the table lamp shown in the background. Goodridge may have been referring to the commission for this pair of miniatures when she wrote a letter to Mary Stiles Newcomb detailing her numerous sitters and stating that she was going to Boston to find additional patrons: "I shall probably go after Mary & Clara Pratt and then go to Templeton where I have an application. Now do not fear I have forgotten your pleasure, it shall be attended to also."⁵

² Stephen Salisbury, Reminiscences and Biographical Notices of Twenty-One Members of the Worcester Fire Society (Worcester: Worcester Fire Society, 1899): 48.

³ Harry Knox Newcomb to Francis Dana Newcomb, March 8, 1854, Newcomb Family Papers 1824-1872, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

⁴ Newcomb Family Papers, 1824-1872.

⁵ Eliza Goodridge to Mary Stiles Newcomb, November 24, 1837, Foster Family Papers 1740-1884, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

