

ABIJAH BIGELOW (1775-1860), October 1853

James Sullivan Lincoln (1811-1888)

oil on canvas

12 x 10 1/8 (30.48 x 25.71)

Deposited by Daniel Berkeley Updike, 1916

Gift of Daniel Berkeley Updike, 1941

Weis #11

Hewes Number: 9

Ex. Coll.: Sitter to his daughter Sarah Bigelow Adams (1805-1886), probably to her granddaughter Elizabeth Bigelow Updike (1831-1896), owned by her son Daniel Berkeley Updike (1860-1941).

Publications:

Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 40(October 1930): 305.

Abijah Bigelow, a 1795 graduate of Dartmouth College, was a lawyer and politician who lived in Leominster and Worcester, Massachusetts. A Federalist representative to Congress from 1800 to 1815, he strongly opposed the War of 1812. Bigelow's correspondence while he was serving in Washington, D.C., reveals a man with strong interest in family and civic issues. He described the actions and debates of Congress to his wife Hannah Gardner Bigelow (1780-1857) and was often frustrated by the American political system. He wrote on December 18, 1811, 'We have no news of importance, the same routine of business in Congress, the same blustering against Great Britain, the same talk of war, and at the close they will rise with doing as little good and as much mischief as usual.'<sup>1</sup> The following month he wrote, '[A]s the federalists have declined taking any part whatever in the debate about raising an army, the democrats begin to falter.... The great difficulty is raising taxes. They dare not do it. They are too cunning to risk their popularity by a land tax, loans &c. When they raise the taxes necessary to carry on a war, I shall think them in earnest, not before.'<sup>2</sup>

After his sojourn in Washington, D.C. Bigelow settled in Worcester and became involved in local politics, serving as a justice of the peace and clerk of the courts in that city. Elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society in 1813, Bigelow was also a Councillor of the

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<sup>1</sup> Bigelow Family Papers, 1785-c. 1883, American Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection. Several of Bigelow's letters are published in Clarence S. Brigham, 'Letters of Abijah Bigelow, Member of Congress to his Wife 1810-1815,' Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 40 (October 1930): 305-406.

<sup>2</sup> Abijah Bigelow to Hannah Gardner Bigelow, January 1, 1812, quoted in Brigham, 'Letters of Abijah Bigelow, Member of Congress, to his Wife,' 322-23.

Society from 1817 to 1828. An author and poet, he submitted his work to Worcester newspapers throughout his life. Six essays titled 'Political Reflections,' were published by the Massachusetts Spy in January and February of 1812, and a group of articles on slavery which he signed 'A Layman' were printed in the Worcester Palladium in January and February of 1838.<sup>3</sup> In 1853, after his retirement from law and political service, the seventy-seven year old Bigelow and his ailing wife visited their daughter Sarah Bigelow Adams (1805-86) in Providence, Rhode Island, and had their portraits painted by the artist James Sullivan Lincoln.

Lincoln, who apprenticed as an engraver, started painting portraits around 1837 and by the 1850s was the leading portrait painter in Providence.<sup>4</sup> Although he also painted miniatures and landscapes, his most significant commissions were his portraits of state governors, senators, and leading businessmen of the city. For fifty-one years Lincoln kept a record book of his portrait commissions, which, after 1860, also included painted photographs.<sup>5</sup> Later in life, Lincoln was elected the first president of the Providence Art Club and, at a retrospective exhibition of his work he was titled 'the father of art in Providence.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>4</sup> Franklin C. Clark, 'A Sketch of the Artist's Life,' Catalogue of the Memorial Exhibition of the Works of James Sullivan Lincoln (Providence, R.I.: Providence Art Club, 1888): 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> "List of Portraits by J. S. Lincoln Painted Since AD 1837," James Sullivan Lincoln Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society. The portraits of Bigelow, his wife, and an image of his daughter Sarah Adams are all listed in the entries for October 1853. They were listed as 'for Seth Adams,' Sarah's husband. The current location of the portraits of Mrs. Bigelow and her daughter are unknown.

<sup>6</sup> Clark, 'Sketch of the Artist's Life,' 13.