

THOMAS PRINCE (1687-1758), c. 1750

Joseph Badger (1708-65)
after John Greenwood (1727-92)
oil on canvas
30 1/2 x 25 (77.47 x 63.50)
Gift of Henry Prentiss, 1836
Weis 97
Hewes Number: 97

Ex. Coll.: Unknown before the donor.

Exhibitions:

1942, 'John Greenwood in America,' Addison Gallery, Andover, Massachusetts.
1974, 'Paul Revere's Boston,' Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 71.
1977, 'Wellsprings of a Nation,' Worcester Art Museum, no. 48.
1995, 'Historic Treasures from Central Massachusetts Historical Societies,' Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, Massachusetts.

Publications:

John Fiske, New France and New England (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1904), 209.
Hamilton A. Hill, History of the Old South Church, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1890), 1: 390.
Lawrence Park, Joseph Badger (Boston: Boston University Press, 1918), 32.
Sibley's Harvard Graduates, s.v. 'Prince, Thomas.'

Often compared to the Reverend Cotton Mather (cat. 78) because of his capacity for knowledge and interest in history, Thomas Prince was one of Boston's most popular clergymen. Born in Sandwich, Massachusetts, he graduated from Harvard College in 1707. After travelling to Barbados and England, Prince was ordained as the minister of Boston's Old South Church in 1718 and continued in that post until his death. Prince 'favored the introduction of singing by note, cut down the number of sermons and...was always a strong advocate of toleration.' He once said: 'I am for leaving every one to the Freedom of Worshipping according to the Light of his Conscience; and for extending Charity to every one who receives the Gospel as the Rule of his Faith and Love.'¹

Prince, a book collector and antiquarian, amassed a library of over 1,500 volumes, including religious tracts and texts relating to the history of New England.² Like Mather, Prince published sermons and other works. In 1736 he issued the first volume of Chronological History

of New England, which he continued to expand until 1755. Examples of his writings can be found in the American Antiquarian Society's imprint collection.

In 1750, at age sixty-three, Prince had his portrait painted by John Greenwood.³ This portrait, which is now part of the collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society, was engraved as a mezzotint in May 1750 by the Boston printmaker Peter Pelham (1697-1751) (fig. 26). The artist Joseph Badger probably based his portrait of the clergyman, with its similar orientation and position of the figure, on the mezzotint. Badger, who began painting portraits in 1740, may have found a ready market for copies of the likeness of one of Boston's most famous ministers.⁴ The early provenance of the American Antiquarian Society's portrait is unknown. At one time, though, it was owned by Henry Prentiss (1767-1843), a prominent lawyer who lived in Princeton, Massachusetts, from 1787 to 1819. Princeton, a town to the north of Worcester, was named for Thomas Prince.

¹ Sibley's Harvard Graduates, s.v. 'Prince, Thomas.'

² Portions of Prince's library are housed in the Boston Public Library.

³ For more on Greenwood, see Samuel Mather (cat. 85).

⁴ For more on Badger, see Ellis Gray (cat. 61).