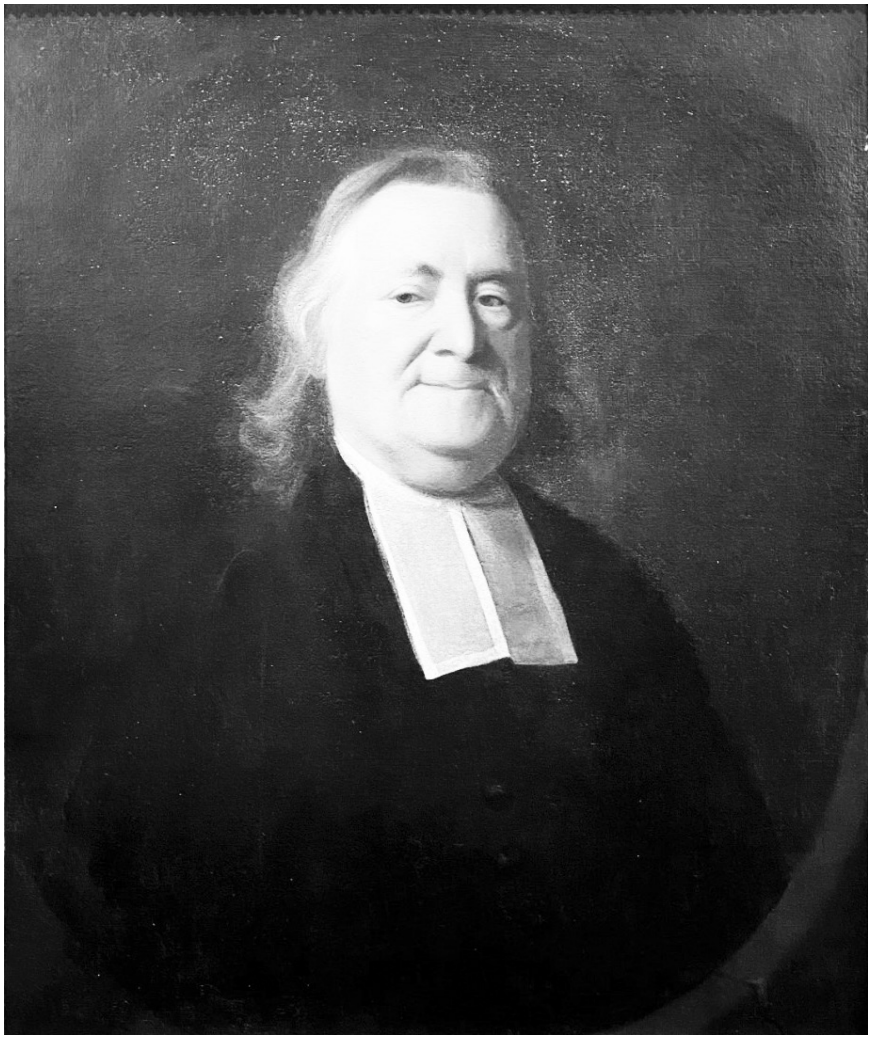

Figure 1: John Singleton Copley's *Reverend Joseph Sewall*

1766, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 in. Private collection; sold at Sotheby's, New York, January 19, 2017. (All dimensions given in height by width).

John Singleton Copley's Portrait of Reverend Joseph Sewall:
New England and Transatlantic Contexts

Joseph Manca

Editor's Introduction: *The following article is an exploration of the portraiture work of John Singleton Copley, a leading painter of the colonial period of British North America. Dr. Joseph Manca focuses on a portrait of Reverend Joseph Sewall, minister of the Old South Church of Boston, in an effort to demonstrate the importance of this painting in the overall career of Copley. Manca argues that this portrait marks a turning point for Copley in terms of his artistic development as well as ambitions for international acclaim.*

John Singleton Copley (1738-1815), likely born in Massachusetts, seems to have had little formal artistic education. In spite of this, he was painting portraits by the age of fifteen, using oil paints, pastels, and engravings, the latter of which would pay more due to the large number of copies that could be sold. Copley became a successful portrait painter in Massachusetts, marrying the daughter of a wealthy agent of the East India Company. He was able to move his wife to a home on Beacon Hill, where they had six children. Copley often complained about the absence of an artistic community and access to viewing the work of great artists in his colonial hometown, but maintained active correspondence with many in England. Enjoying a lucrative career throughout the 1760s and early 1770s, Copley attempted to stay out of the swirling politics of independence, but his ties to loyalist family members made this impossible. After

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years of encouragement through correspondence with supporters in England, Copley left the colony in 1774 for England, never returning to America.

Providing first an in-depth discussion of the subject of the portrait, esteemed Congregational minister Reverend Joseph Sewall, Manca contextualizes the portrait of Sewall within Copley's broader career. Beginning his life in the colonies, but later moving to England, Copley's artistic style shifted in the years leading up to the American war for independence, towards a style more in line with what was popular in Europe than in Boston. The portrait of Joseph Sewall represents, according to the author, an important step towards the new, softer style of painting in England and away from the harder lines of colonial portraiture. Manca argues that the picture of Reverend Sewall is a pivotal moment in Copley's career, as he began to seek acclaim in England.

Joseph Manca is Professor of Art History and the Nina J. Cullinan Professor of Art and Art History at Rice University, where he has taught since 1989. He received his PhD from Columbia University. Recent publications include Shaker Vision: Seeing Beauty in Early America *(Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019).*

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In 1766, Bostonian John Singleton Copley (1738-1815), the leading painter of America's colonial period, captured the likeness of a great contemporary: the Reverend Joseph Sewall (1688-1769; Fig. 1).[1] Copley wrote in a letter of November 12, 1766, "I have been painting the head of a Decenting [dissenting] Cleargyman and his friends are desireous to subscribe for" a print based on that picture.[2] For over fifty years, Sewall served as minister of the Old South Church for the Congregational believers in Boston who, for most of Sewall's time leading them, gathered in what is now known as the Old South Meeting House (built 1729; Fig. 2). Sewall also gained a reputation in his later years as a strong supporter of colonial political rights in the face of English infringements in the 1760s. Copley made the painting at a significant turning point in his own career. In its novel style, the painting throws light on Copley's development as an artist and his desire for international fame. It is also rare in being a painting from Copley's American period (1774 and before) that he arranged to have copied by a printmaker. Never owned by a museum, and spending much of its recent life away from the East Coast, the picture, now in private hands after its recent sale from Sotheby's in New York, is little discussed in the Copley literature.[3] This article is the first extended discussion of this important painting.

LIFE OF REVEREND JOSEPH SEWALL

Sewall was born on August 15, 1688, the eighth child and sixth son of Samuel Sewall (1652-1730), who, four years after Joseph's birth, served as a judge in the Salem-area witch trials, a role for which he later apologized and asked others to forgive him.[4] Samuel kept a detailed diary that spanned decades, providing us with information about the youth of Joseph Sewall. At the time of his birth, "Joseph" was not a Sewall family name. Samuel named his child "not out of respect to any Relation, or other person," but "in hopes of the accomplishment of the Prophecy, Ezek 37th and such like," that is, as instrumental in the sustenance and unity of God-fearing believers. From Ezekiel 37:15-19:

> The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.[5]

The brothers of the biblical Joseph sold him into slavery in Egypt. In another religious and meaningful connection that the father must have felt with the name Joseph, Samuel was the first colonial American to publish an anti-slavery tract, calling it *The Selling of Joseph* (1700). Judge Sewall wrote:

> *Liberty is in real value next unto Life: None ought to part with it themselves, or deprive others of it, but upon most mature Consideration…* Originally, and Naturally, there is no such thing as Slavery. Joseph was rightfully no more a Slave to his Brethren, than they were to him: and they had no more Authority to *Sell* him, than they had to *Slay* him.[6]

According to Samuel's records, real-life young Joseph was hardly the best student in school.[7] He was not the best-behaved child, either, and the energetic and rebellious part of his personality perhaps explains in part his forcible character as an adult and his emotive style of preaching. Samuel, writing seven weeks after the court ordered Giles Corey (1611-1692) to be "press'd to death for standing Mute" at his witchcraft trial, recorded this of his four-year-old son:

> Nov. 6 [1692]: Joseph threw a knop [knob] of Brass and hit his Sister Betty on the forhead so as to make it bleed and swell; upon which, and for his playing at Prayer-time, and eating when Return Thanks [during the saying of Grace at table], I whipd him pretty smartly. When I first went in (call'd by his Grandmother) he sought to shadow and hide himself from me behind the head of the Cradle: which gave me the sorrowfull remembrance of Adam's carriage [that is, Adam hiding from God after the First Sin in the Garden of Eden.

The following spring, young Joseph swallowed a bullet and nearly choked on it.[8]

It must not have been easy being the son of the forbidding Judge Samuel Sewall, but, after graduating from Harvard College in 1707, and receiving a Master's degree from that institution in 1710, Joseph followed his father's desired path and became a minister.[9] Copley called him the "Decenting" clergyman because Joseph stood apart from the official Anglican Church, adhering, like his father, to Congregational beliefs. Joseph shared his father's theological outlook. When Samuel died in 1730, Joseph gave a passionate sermon, with autobiographical implications, about "bereaved children." He reflected on the God-directed inevitability of death, noting: "No sooner had Man sinn'd but Death had power over him, and began to work towards a dissolution of this earthly frame." Death is the common lot of all people, good or bad, "undeniable evidence that Adam's first sin is imputed to them; and that we all bring a corrupt Nature into the World with us."[10]

Figure 2: Old South Meeting House, c. 1870

Sewall remained with his flock from 1713 until the end of his life. The year his ministry began, he married Bostonian Elizabeth Walley (1685-1756). It was the custom in the Old South Church to maintain

two pastors of equal authority, and from 1718 to 1758, Sewall served as co-pastor with his friend and college classmate, Thomas Prince (1687-1758). In his eulogistic oration of July 3, 1769, Congregational clergyman Charles Chauncy (1705-1787) stated that Sewall had been offered, and declined, the presidency of Harvard College in August 1724. Four years later, Joseph Sewall "was elected a member of the College-corporation; which trust he accepted, and executed with consciencious fidelity, and a becoming zeal to promote, among the sons of HARVARD, not only learning in the liberal arts and sciences, but religion also both in its *doctrinal and practical* purity."[11] Sewall remained as a member of the corporation of Harvard College from 1728 to 1765.[12] In another mark of the esteem of others, Sewall received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1731 from the University of Glasgow.

Early sources suggest that Sewall was both approachable and humane, but also serious and sober. For his sympathetic side, we read in Chauncy's eulogistic discourse, given a week after Sewall's death in 1769, that "in conversation he was agreably pleasant; and the more so, as his affability was ever mixed with a becoming gravity."[13] Chauncy further stated that Sewall "was, in his temper, pitiful, tender-hearted, courteous, kindly affectioned."[14] For Sewall's fundamental humanity and sympathy, we learn from early Harvard historian John Eliot (1754-1813) that Sewall's "donation to the college of money to be appropriated to indigent scholars, has been of considerable use. He gave this during his life, and was among the first to repair the loss of the library, when Harvard Hall was consumed by fire."[15]

Although pleasant, Sewall was no jolly man. Chauncy, who spoke of his gravity, noted that "his very presence banished away every thing of levity, and solemnized the minds of all those who were with him." Eliot wrote that Joseph Sewall's "character was uniform, and the observation has often been made, if he entered into company something serious or good dropt from his lips."[16] Writing with some prejudice toward Calvinism, and embracing more of an Enlightenment attitude, Eliot suggested that the reverend was of unbending character and belief:

> He was a genuine disciple of the famous John Calvin. He dwelt upon the great articles of the christian faith in preaching and conversation; and dreaded the propagation of any opinions in this country, which were contrary to the principles of our fathers. Hence he was no friend to free inquiries, or to any discussion of theological opinions, which were held true by the first reformers.[17]

Sewall's reputation as a preacher, borne out by a look at his published sermons, was that he was fiery and passionate on the pulpit; he was "a preacher of such fervor and unction that he was universally known as the 'Weeping Prophet.'"[18] Chauncy's eulogy tells us that "his manner in delivering them [sermons] was serious, grave, solemn; and Sometimes he uttered himself with

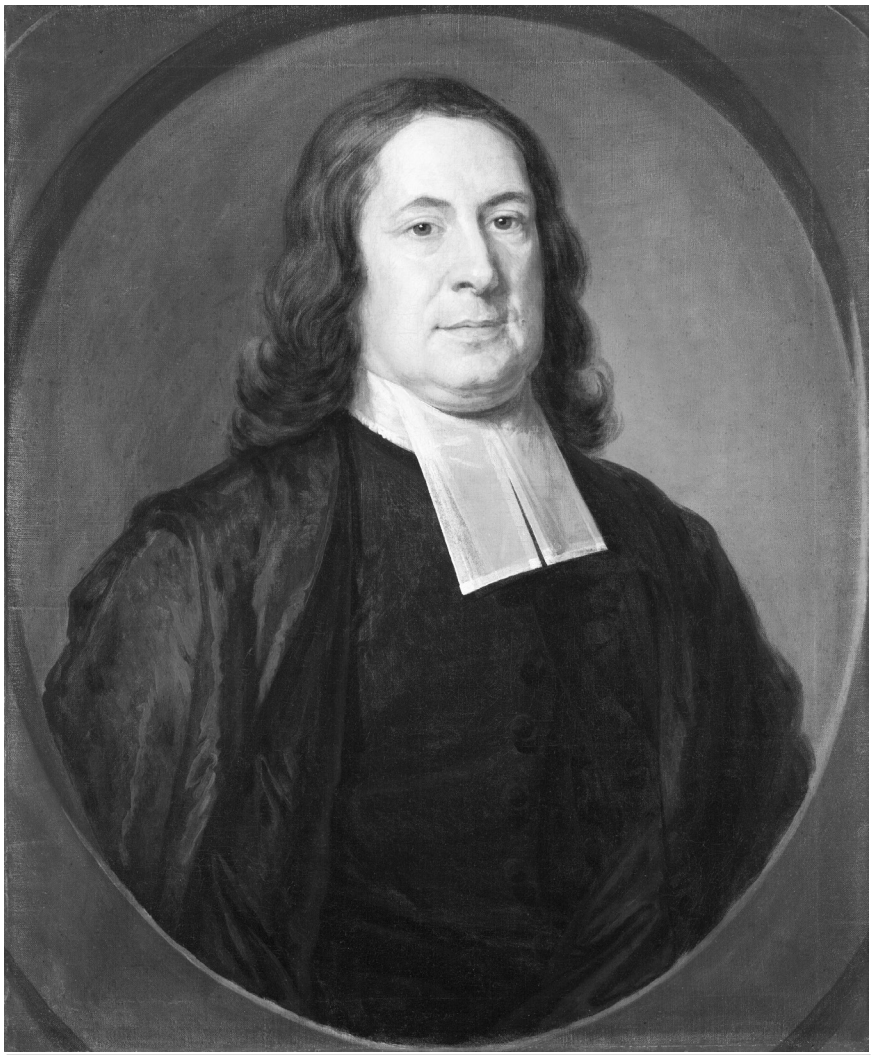

Figure 3: John Smibert's *Rev. Joseph Sewall*, 1735

Oil on canvas, 29 7/8 x 24 3/4 in. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

a voice so elevated with zeal, and so modulated under the influence of a deeply affected heart, as that he arrested the attention of his hearers."[19]

The texts of Sewall's sermons, many of them published at the time, indicate the power and passion of his language, which he articulated using his fiery oratorical skills. We might cite an early and a later sermon. In 1717, the young minister Sewall railed against the sin of covetousness, especially in the panting after "Worldly Riches:"

> We must observe ourselves Carefully; We must compass a diligent Search, and look narrowly into the State of our Souls, and seriously Consider whether this Lust have not the Possession of us. The Distemper must be known, the wound searched, before a proper Remedy can be applied. Our hearts are naturally *deceitful, and desperately wicked . . .We must look to ourselves, and Watch against the First Motion and Inclination of our hearts towards this dreadful Evil.*[20]

Later, during the Seven Years' War, when the British captured Havana from the Spanish in 1762, Sewall delivered a thunderous, celebratory sermon before leaders in Massachusetts. He called Spain, Austria, and France "those great Supporters of *Antichrist*," and Sewall relished the thought that, in recent battle, "the Flower of the *French* Infantry, were blasted, and in a great Measure cut to Pieces, or made Prisoners."[21] Joseph Sewall's theology of sin, human weakness, and fear before God was in line with that held by other Congregational preachers of his time, but he stood apart in that his emotional delivery from the pulpit, strong language, the long duration of his ministry, and the good number of printed publications of his sermons made him an especially formidable presence in Boston and its environs for the greater part of the eighteenth century.

Many American portraits of clergyman from the colonial and early national period show stern and unbending men. In contrast, the known, lifetime likenesses of Joseph Sewall present a man who was capable and devout, yet also of good will. Portraying Sewall during his time of ascent as minister (1735), and doing so perhaps as a gift for Sewall's presiding over the artist's wedding, the Scottish-born painter John Smibert (1688-1751) showed the reverend as confident and healthy, the portraitist endowing Sewall with a touch of soft humanity around his eyes and mouth (Fig. 3).[22] Artist Peter Pelham (c. 1697-1751), the stepfather of John Singleton Copley, made a variant copy of Smibert's picture (Fig. 4), reversing the composition for his print format, and representing Sewall in a favorable and less-than-stern way. [23]

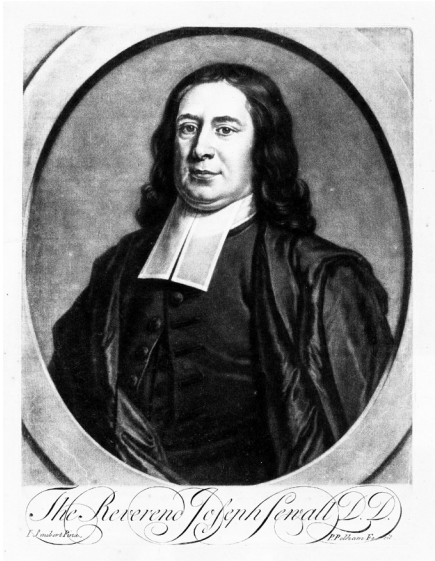

Figure 4: *The Reverend Joseph Sewall*

Peter Pelham, after John Smibert, c. 1735, mezzotint, plate: 9 5/8 x 9 3/8 in. British Museum, London.

Pelham's print is in mezzotint, with an impressively textured representation of skin, hair, and cloth, the kind of rendering that his stepson Copley hoped would enhance the printed copies of his *Reverend Joseph Sewall* of 1766. As for conveying the moral character of the sitter, Copley, like Smibert and Pelham, also captured the self-confidence, intelligence, and sympathetic side of Sewall as well as his firm religious character (Fig. 1).

From Copley's portrait, we can get a sense that Sewall was indeed a man that society held in high esteem, as described by Eliot in 1809: "and when he [Sewall] grew venerable for his age, as well as his piety, he was regarded as the father of the clergy. The rising generation looked upon him with reverence, and all classes of people felt a respect for his name."[24] That Sewall's fulfillment with his life and ministry continued into his last years is expressed in the Latin phrase in Nathaniel Hurd's (1730-1777) engraving (Fig. 5): "Vita bene acta efficit senectutem jucundam," or "a life well lived makes for a happy old age," a motto adapted from Cicero's dialogue *De senectute, On Old Age* (44 BC).

Joseph Sewall attended the Boston Latin School before college, and continued his studies in Latin throughout his life, especially as knowledge of that language was essential during his education at Harvard and his later, continued reading of theological literature. Cotton Mather (1663-1728), a Boston clergyman who himself had wanted to hold the presidency of Harvard, a post offered to Sewall, sniped that Sewall was more pious than learned.[25] Chauncy, in a more balanced assessment, opined that Sewall "was not distinguished among the Clergy" for his worldly wisdom, but that he did possess a kind of wisdom "from above."[26] As Eliot stated it:

> Although Dr. Sewall was more remarkable for his piety than his learning… he was a very good classical scholar. He could write handsomely in latin when he was an old man, and had read many

> authors in that language. Most of the works of the great divines of the preceding [that is, the eighteenth] century were written in latin, as it was a kind of universal language among the literati of Europe.[27]

Sewall enjoyed excellent health until near the end. The early sources state that Sewall suffered a sudden paralysis a week after his eightieth birthday, and he died within a year. "It pleased the Lord of life to bless him with health, as well as other means of enjoyment. He lived to a good old age; and preached to his people the evening he had arrived at fourscore years. The next Sabbath he was seized with a paralytical complaint, which confined him some months, and he died, June 27th, 1769, in the 81st year of his age."[28] A Boston newspaper reported more specifically that the reverend lost the use of one arm, suggesting that he suffered from what we would call a stroke.[29]

We have looked at the religious context of Sewall's life, but there was a secular side to his public actions, as well. He was perhaps not the most political man of the cloth in Massachusetts of his time, but he was recognized as a firm supporter of American liberty. The admirers of the reverend who wanted prints of the image might have felt warmly about him in part because of his backing of colonial rights after the Sugar Act and Currency Act of 1764. Furthermore, Copley had not yet started the portrait in 1765, the year of the Stamp Act, and the continuing desire for his portrait and engravings of it might be seen at least in part in the light of those turbulent times. An unsigned eulogy published immediately after his death stated: "He [Joseph Sewall] was greatly alarmed with every motion to introduce the Hierarchy into these Colonies, whose predecessors had, at the peril of every earthly comfort, fled from the face of ecclesiastical tyranny. Nor was he less jealous of the attempts made to deprive us of our civil liberties."[30] Sewall's ever-useful eulogizer Chauncy wrote in 1769 that Sewall was committed to local rights:

> He was a strenuous asserter of our civil and ecclesiastical CHARTER RIGHTS AND PRIVILEDGES. He knew the value of them — He knew they were the purchase of our fore-fathers at the expence of much labor, blood, and treasure. — He could not bear the thought of their being wrested out of our hands. — He esteemed it our duty, in all wise, reasonable, and legal ways, to endeavour the preservation of them. And it was the earnest of his heart, that they might be fully enjoyed by us, and transmitted from us, in the fullest extent, to the latest generations.[31]

Sewall's congregation remained on the side of colonial rights and rebellion. Especially after the British occupation of Boston in 1768, and, thus, still during Sewall's time of ministry, the Old South Meeting House became a regular meeting place for the Sons of Liberty and other patriots. Just four years after Sewall's death, the patriots met in the Old South Meeting House in preparation for the Boston Tea Party. When the British occupied the city in great numbers in 1775, they stripped out most of the wooden fixtures inside and turned the interior of the meeting house into a riding and exercise area for troops, an indignity spared places such as the Anglican Old North Church.

COPLEY'S PORTRAIT OF SEWALL

Turning to Copley and the role of the picture in his life, we might consider more about the commission, the artistic style, and the prints made afterward. As for the undertaking in the context of Copley's career in America, the portrait of Joseph Sewall has both expected and unusual aspects. We are indebted to art historian Jules Prown and the statistical data and categorical information that he gathered on 240 American-period portraits by Copley.[32] The *Reverend Joseph Sewall* is in the majority in several categories: 80% of Copley's portraits before 1775 were of citizens of Massachusetts, and fully half were Bostonians, like Joseph Sewall. Of college graduates, about 80% were Harvard men, as was Sewall. Two-thirds of Copley's sitters were Congregational worshipers (the artist himself was Anglican), putting Sewall again in the majority.

As for the more exceptional aspects of the work, 55% of Copley's male sitters were businessmen or landed gentry, while a little under 10% were ministers. And, to be sure, as Prown showed, the vast majority of sitters would have been rather wealthier than a minister like Sewall.[33] On the other hand, 10% is not an insubstantial part of Copley's oeuvre of male sitters, and ministers were esteemed members of the community. By comparison with Copley's eleven portraits of ministers in Prown's survey, Copley painted only six lawyers and three medical doctors. As for the format, Copley's portraits of ministers were, compared to those of other men and women, far more likely to receive a restricted field of representation: to focus our attention on the minister's character, to avoid vainglorious associations with worldly things, and, to control costs, Copley's portraits of ministers generally represent the head, shoulders, and chest, with minimal backgrounds. Indeed, many eighteenth-century colonial portraits of ministers, as with the Reverend

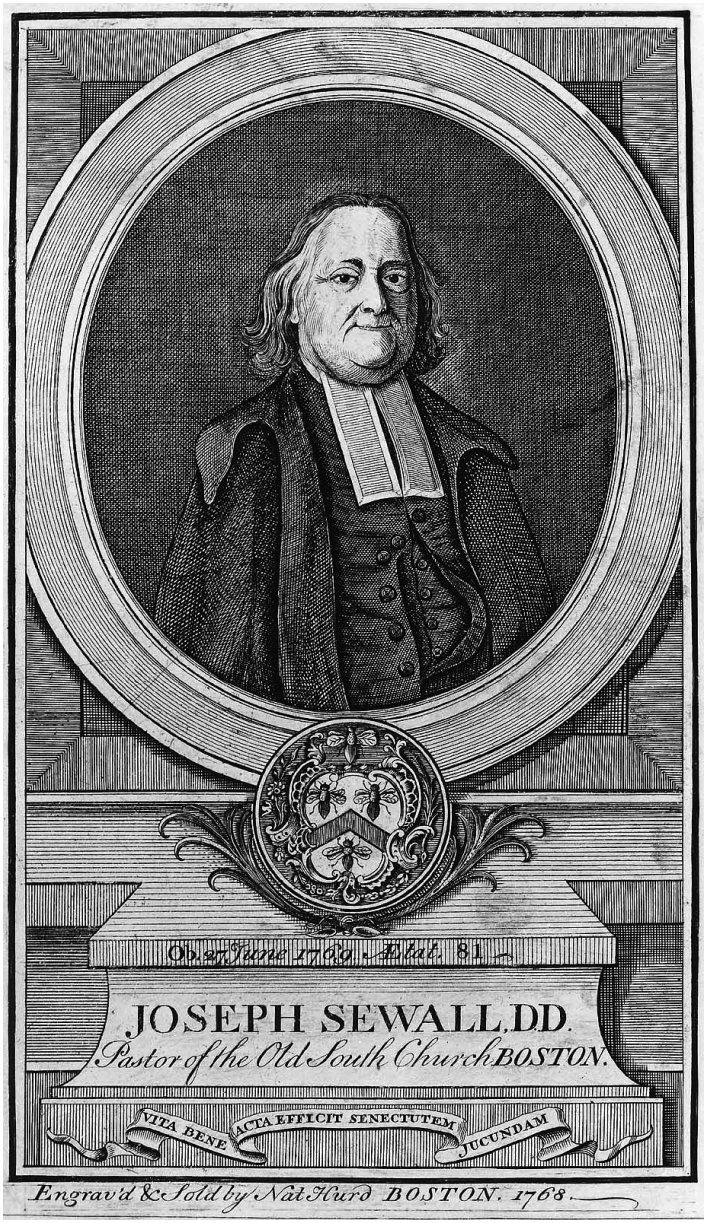

Figure 5: Nathaniel Hurd's Engraving

Nathaniel Hurd, after John Singleton Copley, *Joseph Sewall, D. D.*, 1769, mezzotint (second state), plate: 7 1/8 by 4 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It reads: "Vita bene acta efficit senectutem jucundam," or "a life well lived makes for a happy old age" (1768).

Joseph Sewall, follow the oval "porthole" format, with the bust-length figure and flat backdrop seen through a painted frame represented as stone or wood (cf. Figs. 3, 4, 5, and 12). As for cost, Prown, citing Copley's portrait of Joseph Sewall in particular, concluded that a portrait of Sewall's size (30 x 25 inches) cost about half as much as a half or three-quarter length portrait (50 x 40 inches), and one quarter the cost of a full-length figure on a canvas 94 inches in height.[34]

What really sets apart the commission of the *Reverend Joseph Sewall,* within Copley's oeuvre, is its creation as part of a planned production of prints. Copley, as we saw, was in the process of painting the picture in November 1766.[35] However, as we saw, he had the idea for the project by the beginning of the previous year, if not earlier, writing to an unknown English mezzotinter on January 25, 1765:

> Out of pure regard to a good Old Decenting Cleargyman of this Town several Gentlemen have apply'd to me for the procuration of his portrait in Metzotinto. I therefore beg You will be pleasd to let me know on what terms You will undertake the same, and add to your demand for cutting the plate (which must be fourteen inches by ten and containing only a head of the Rev'd Doc'r Sewell) that of paper and Printing p[e]r hundred, for as to number I shall want, that at present is alltogether uncertain.[36]

This was an impressive first conception of the project. In a separate and formal proposal, also datable to circa January 25, 1765, Copley specified that "the Gentlemen" in question wished to "subscribe for prints to the amount of three hundred," and Copley wanted the prints carried out by "the Ablest Master in London from a painting done by himself" and to be framed and protected by glass. The proposal of early 1765 implied that Copley had not started the portrait yet. Given the sitter's advanced age, he expressed his worry that "The Father of mercys should take the Good Doctor to himself" before he could capture Sewall's likeness in a proper sitting.[37]

It is noteworthy that Copley wanted to make sure that the printmaker would preserve the sitter's likeness as recorded in the painting, with verisimilitude being important and, according to Copley (1765), "a main part of the exellency of a portrait in the oppinion of our New England Conoseurs."[38] Near this time, Captain John Small (1729-96) wrote to Copley from New York, stating that a "striking Likeness," elegant finish, and "very masterly performance" form essential aspects of what connoisseurs regard as the most excellent portraits.[39] We can believe that Copley tried to capture

Sewall's features as best he could. The artist had also during this early period used the pastel medium to create vivid and present portraits images; the use of pastels allowed for the blending of colors and created a surface that is both graceful and harmonious.[40] Both Copley and his American patrons and viewers believed that lifelikeness was an important part of a good portrait.

COPLEY'S INTERNATIONAL AMBITIONS

Copley's work on the *Reverend Joseph Sewall* occurred at a key time in his career and artistic development, as attested by the surviving paintings of the time and an exchange of letters and ideas with notable men in the art scene in England. Copley, who came from a modest economic background, had always been highly ambitious. Even as a teenager, he copied complex compositions found in European prints and rendered them in oil.[41] He was highly successful by the mid-1760s, and worked well with wealthy colonial patrons, but he wanted to achieve international fame, including the approbation of leading artists in the Mother Country.

In 1765, the same year he was first planning the portrait of Joseph Sewall and hoping in the future help produce hundreds of mezzotints of it, Copley painted *A Boy with a Flying Squirrel (Henry Pelham)*, and sent it to London for public exhibition at the Society of Artists, which was a kind of precursor to the Royal Academy of Arts (Fig. 6). The Bostonian painter hoped to make a splash in London, and he took great care in rendering realistically the hair and clothing of his seated half-brother, and he labored to bring out the reflections on the table and depict the surfaces of other fine and curious objects surrounding the boy. Copley received detailed feedback in two letters from London. On August 4, 1766, an American ship captain there, R. G. Bruce, wrote to Copley that the great English painter Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) inspected the picture and found "a little Hardness in the Drawing, Coldness in the Shades, An over minuteness." There was encouraging news, too: according to Bruce, the venerable Reynolds thought that Copley had achieved a "*very wonderfull Performance*," surpassing "any Portrait that Mr. [Benjamin] West ever drew." Reynolds stated that Copley could be "one of the first Painters in the World" if he traveled to Europe for study rather than continuing to work in his "little way at Boston." [42] For his part, the American-born painter Benjamin West (1738-1820), resident in London and also writing to Copley on August 4, 1766, found much to like in Copley's style, but, like Reynolds, West found it to be not rounded enough at the contours, and thus "to[o] liney" and not achieving "the greatest Bewty and freedom."[43]

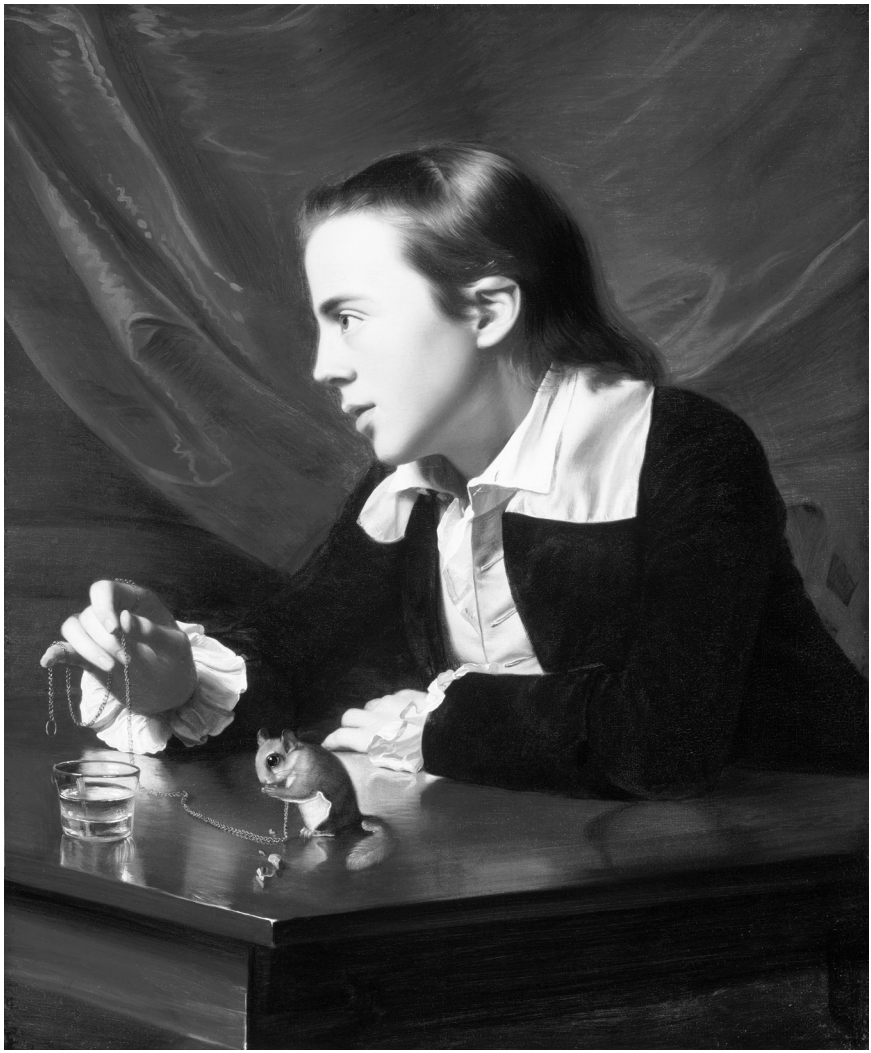

Figure 6: ***A Boy with a Flying Squirrel (Henry Pelham)***

John Singleton Copley, 1765, oil on canvas, 30 3/8 x 25 1/8 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Figure 7: ***Young Lady with a Bird and a Dog***
John Singleton Copley, 1767, oil on canvas, 48 x 39 1/2 in. Toledo Museum of Art.

Copley responded to West at length about his style and his life situation, in a letter dated November 12, 1766. That was the exact moment, as Copley stated, when he was in the middle of painting Joseph Sewall, so what he wrote to West at that time is noteworthy. Copley confessed that *A Boy with the Flying Squirrel* "was too lin[e]d," a fault that he would "indeavour to avoid" in his next picture for exhibition of the Society of Artists, which we know to be the *Young Lady with a Bird and a Dog* of 1767 (Fig. 7). Copley complained that "in this Country [the colonies] as You rightly observe there is no examples of Art, except what is to [be] met with in a few prints indiferently exicuted, from which it is not possable to learn much." In Boston, Copley complained, "I think myself peculiarly unlucky in Liveing in a place into which there has not been one portrait brought that is worthy to be call'd a Picture within my memory, which leaves me at a great loss to g[u]ess the stile that You, Mr. Re[y]nolds, and the other Artists practice."[44]

Thus, right after and even during the correspondence with those in London came the planning and execution of the painter's *Reverend Joseph Sewall*. Copley could apply the critical suggestions from abroad while painting the portrait of the minister and the *Young Lady with a Bird and a Dog*. Like Copley's much-discussed two pictures of children with animals, the artist intended to ship the portrait of Sewall to England. While not necessarily intended to be on public exhibition, but primarily for a printmaker to make a mezzotint, the *Reverend Joseph Sewall* would nonetheless have been seen by English eyes and subject to the judgment of anyone there with access to it. Moreover, the resulting mezzotints could then be distributed to any American or European buyer, as prints passed easily from nation to nation, and in multiple copies. We would thus expect that Copley, thirsting for fame and recognition across the Atlantic, would try to apply what he learned from the feedback he received from Joshua Reynolds, Benjamin West, and other unnamed British voices alluded to in his transatlantic correspondence.

RESPONDING TO ENGLISH CRITICISM & CREATING THE MEZZOTINT

The state of preservation of the *Reverend Joseph Sewall* is far from ideal, with scattered inpainting covering perhaps twenty percent of the surface, plus a large patch of overpainting on the skin of the shadowed, proper left side of the face. Still, from what we can see of the original surfaces, there is a softness in the hair, and a generalized, splotchy application of complex coloring on the face, indicating that Copley had altered his style to fit English criticism received just before and while he was starting to undertake the commission.

The first known photograph of the portrait, published in 1897, shows it before the modern inpainting, and freely rendered depiction of the hair and other parts are apparent (Fig. 8). These painterly touches make the portrait stand out among his American portraits at this time, when in the colonies a harder, more contoured treatment was accepted and perhaps expected. For example, when Copley turned to make the likeness of silversmith and engraver Paul Revere in 1768 (Fig. 9), he gave the American sitter more defined contours, a harder treatment of particulars, and a marvelously scrupulous level of detail, all of which American patrons apparently enjoyed, but exactly what the British critics told Copley to avoid.

The desire to represent lifelike features and a hope to translate into printmaking the subtle rendering of shadows and texture are indicated by Copley's wish to have the prints made in mezzotint. An artist makes engravings with grooves cut into a copperplate with a burin, which has a

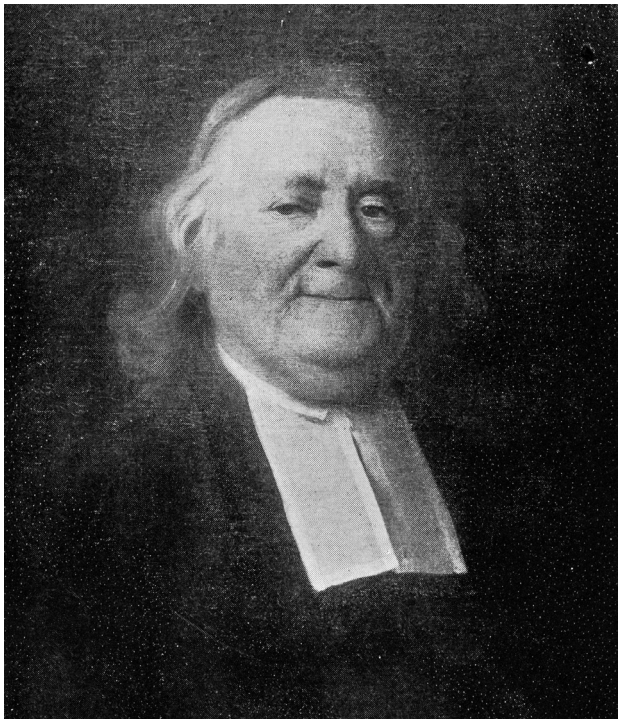

Figure 8: Photograph of Copley's *Reverend Joseph Sewall*

See Fig. 1 here, from N. H. (Nathan Henry) Chamberlain, *Samuel Sewall and the World He Lived In* (Boston: De Wolfe, Fiske & Co., 1897), opp. page 212.

single, sharp point for cutting. Instead, with mezzotints, the maker presses and rotates a broad, shovel-like, hand-held rocker with numerous "teeth" upon a copper plate, where it produces numerous burrs and tiny pockets that can take the ink, resulting in a patchier gradation of design that is ideal for rendering texture and shadows. Mezzotint produces tones halfway between black and white, offering subtlety. Copley had some minor experience in making mezzotints, but, for this project, he wanted the services of a skilled and specialized printmaker.[45]

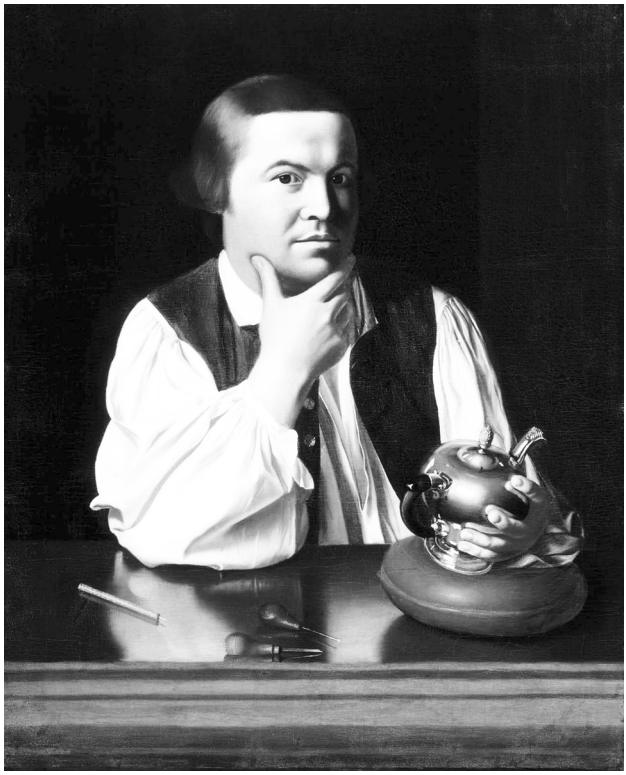

Figure 9: *Paul Revere*

John Singleton Copley, *Paul Revere,* 1768, oil on canvas, 35 1/8 x 28 1/2 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Joseph W. Revere, William B. Revere, and Edward H. R. Revere.

Figure 10: ***A Jewish Rabbi***

William Pether, after Rembrandt van Rijn, 1764, mezzotint, 20 1/2 x 14 1/2 in. British Museum, London.

By November 1766, after the searing criticism of the lininess of his technique, Copley wanted to be able to distribute prints endowed with the softest and best shaded likeness that he could and sought a skilled printmaker, inquiring whether William Pether (1731-c. 1795) was available. Pether was highly successful in England. Copley praised "the well exicuted

Figure 11: ***Nathaniel Hurd***

John Singleton Copley, c. 1765-66, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 1/2 in. Cleveland Museum of Art.

print by Mr. Pether of a Jew Rabbi" (1764; Fig. 10), which is a close variant copy after Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-69).[46] Copley must have been drawn to Pether's especially rich gradations of chiaroscuro and subtle and soft rendering of surface details. In the *Reverend Joseph Sewall* and the mezzotints, the proud Copley wanted to impress the public, critics, and fellow artists on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite his protests, Copley did have artistic models in the colonies that he could study to improve his art, as he had clearly seen at least this one finely rendered work by Pether.

We do not know what inquiries Benjamin West made in England on Copley's behalf, or what price was available in Britain for Copley to produce prints by a good mezzotint artist in the fourteen-by-ten-inch size he desired. Copley's delay in painting the picture for nearly two years or more is likely owing to his lack of success in finding an English mezzotinter, which he was still inquiring about in November 1766. At that point, Copley apparently decided to paint the work first, and then find a printmaker. There is no surviving contract between Copley and the printmaker, but the signed prints indicate that Bostonian Nathaniel Hurd produced two compositions based on Copley's portrait of Reverend Sewall. Hurd had produced fine silver and also made a wide variety of designs on paper such as engravings, monetary currency, bookplates, and business cards. Copley knew Hurd well and painted his portrait several times before late 1766. One large, completed portrait of Hurd is now in Cleveland (Fig. 11), while Copley's unfinished portrait of the craftsman is now in Rochester (Memorial Art Gallery—University of Rochester).[47] While not the equal of the "Ablest Master in London," Hurd, though no Pether, knew the mezzotint and engraving techniques, and he could capture a convincing likeness.

Hurd made two prints after Copley's picture. The first, c. 1767-1768, is tiny, only a few inches in height, and meager in design elements (Fig. 12). Hurd advertised on it with the words "engraved & Sold by Nat. Hurd. Boston." Very few impressions of this design exist, suggesting that the number produced was far from the three hundred impressions that Copley wrote about in early 1765. Hurd reissued that first print in 1769 in a second state, marking the death of the reverend with an inscription.[48]

The second version is larger and finer: it follows Copley's original oval porthole framing, and is complex spatially, including the steps, paneling behind, coat of arms, and five horizontal lines of inscriptions. According to the lowest line of the inscription, Hurd produced it in 1768 and was offering it for sale; Hurd also made a second state of it after Sewall's death in 1769, as noted on the upper part of the plinth seen here (Fig. 5). This work is in mezzotint, and closer in size to what Copley had wanted from an English

printmaker.[49] This version is graced with an elaborate rendering of the Sewall family coat of arms and crest, which are dominated in design by a chevron and bees.[50] Hurd seems to have made more impressions than the smaller version, but still not in a great total number.

Copley might have hoped that his *Reverend Joseph Sewall* could be appreciated in England, as the work has the patchiness and softness that critics seemed to call for. Copley made similar changes to the *Young Lady with a Bird and a Dog* (Fig. 7), hoping to give the British critics what they wanted. He rendered the landscape in a rich, painterly fashion, softened the hair of the girl, and applied a freer brushwork to particulars such as the tail of the dog and the contours of the chair. But viewers in England still found faults. Nearly everyone in London who saw it objected to the oddly bombastic setting, with a playful little girl in modern costume depicted in an idealized, open room that included a massive column, a setting more typically seen in earlier art ("The Back Ground Should have had a look this time," that is, 1767). This painting is large and filled with objects and creatures, but critics thought that Copley did not make the "under parts of the Pictures more subordinate to the principal;" for example, the head and hands of the girl are not more finely done than the "Dog, Parrot[,] Carpet, etc." Reynolds and others thought that the darks were too dark, and the lights too light, and that the "Shadows of the flash [flesh] wants transperency."[51] Copley never found out what the London critics might have thought of his *Reverend Joseph Sewall*, but, with its modest scale, we can imagine that it would have avoided some of the charges of excess and disunity leveled against his *Young Lady with a Parrot and a Dog*.

COPLEY EMBRACES A NEW STYLE IN ENGLAND

Copley must have felt frustrated with the reception of his pictures in England, and he stayed in the colonies as long as he could, as he was making a good living and he married into a well-to-do family in 1769. He would not leave the colonies until 1774. His wife, Susanna ["Sukey"] (1745-1836), was the daughter of the merchant Richard Clarke (1711-95), to whom was consigned the tea dumped in the Boston Tea Party (1773). Unlike Joseph Sewall, Copley did not take a vigorous stance in favor of colonial rights, and the painter tried to stay neutral as he hoped for political compromise. John and Susanna were in Richard Clarke's house in Boston on November 17, 1773, when an anti-tax crowd surrounded the home, noisily made their grievances known, and broke into the house, smashed furnishings, and gave fright to all inside. This ominous atmosphere in Boston continued into 1774, when Copley and his family faced other mob violence and threats. Copley left

Fig. 12: Nathaniel Hurd, after John Singleton Copley, *Reverend Joseph Sewall*, c. 1767-1768

Engraving, 3 3/4 by 2 3/16 in. Historic Deerfield, Massachusetts. Courtesy of Historic Deerfield.

for England in June of 1774. He traveled in Europe, studied the Old Masters, and settled in England, where he became a leading member of the Royal Academy, changing his style radically to a bravura technique with a feathery, free touch and bright colors. This is the opposite of his final American style of c. 1766-74, which was more realistic and dark than it had been before, and epitomized by the *Paul Revere* (Fig. 9).

The *Reverend Joseph Sewall* was just right in its somber coloring and limited format, as it represented a Congregational minister, but Copley had rendered it with appealing painterly touches that would suit English criticism and taste. We might think of it as a trial run, or a prelude, to the free brushwork that he would use after his move to England. But that style would be on hold and remain undeveloped while Copley remained in the colonies, where sitters seemed to prefer sharp details and naturalistic representation of people and objects.

As it is, the *Reverend Joseph Sewall* hung largely out of sight over the next centuries, engravings for it were few in number and not carried out by the likes of a William Pether, and it is still little known today. Nevertheless, the painting is a remarkable document of its age: it is an experimental technique by Copley and a vivid and likeable portrait of a man who served for decades as a fiery orator and a leader of his congregation in the heart of Boston, who supported Harvard College, and who stood as a champion of American colonial liberties.

HJM

Notes

1. For some mentions of the picture, see N. H. (Nathan Henry) Chamberlain, *Samuel Sewall and the World He Lived In* (Boston: De Wolfe, Fiske & Co., 1897), ill. opp. 212; Frank W. Bayley, *The Life and Works of John Singleton Copley, Founded on the Work of Augustus Thorndike Perkins* (Boston: The Taylor Press, 1915), 151-152, and 223; Barbara Neville Parker and Anne Bolling Wheeler, *John Singleton Copley: American Portraits in Oil, Pastel, and Miniature, with Biographical Sketches* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1938), 267 (listed as location unknown); Jules David Prown, *John Singleton Copley: In America, 1738-1774* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, published for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1966), vol. 1 (In America), 45, 56-57, 98, and 228, and fig. 196; and Carrie Rebora and Paul Staiti, *John Singleton Copley in America* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, distributed by Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 210 (listed as location unknown, although it was sold in Sotheby's in New York in that year [see the provenance below]). Clifford K. Shipton*, Sibley's Harvard Graduates, Volume V. 1701-1712. Biographical Sketches of Those who Attended Harvard College in the Classes 1701-1712 with Bibliographical and*

*Other Notes (Bost*on: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1937), 390, noted the picture, but knew only of a painted copy, and he had not seen any of Hurd's prints: "A Copley portrait formerly owned by Thomas Robie Sewall [that is, the original] is now not to be found, but a copy by [Albert Gallatin] Hoit [1809-1856] belongs to Mr. Edgar L. Heermance of New Haven. In the Copley correspondence there is mention of a mezzotint of this portrait, but no copy is known." The painting has been attributed to Copley in all of the literature above, except in the publication of 1897, where Chamberlain identified the sitter but offered no attribution or location of the picture.

2. *Letters & Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, 1739-1776* (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1914), Copley to Benjamin West, 12 November 1766, 52. [Hereafter abbreviated as Letters & Papers.] There is a now-untraced record of a bill for a portrait of "1770… to [one portrait] of Doctr. Sewall, at 4 guineas… 5 [pounds] 12 [shillings]," indicating that he had indeed completed the picture (cf. Prown, 57); see Bayley, 137. The date seems to refer to the record of the bill, not the execution of the portrait, which we know was being painted in late 1766 (see above in note), and Bayley gives the date of the portrait as 1766 (223).

3. The provenance as suggested in the Sotheby's sale catalogue of 2017 reads: descended in the family of the sitter; George Gilman Chapin; Robert B. Campbell Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts; Grand Central Art Galleries, New York, 1950; IBM International Foundation [by 1966; see Prown, 228]; Sotheby's, New York, September 14, 1995, sale 6736, lot 21; Alan Miller, Quakertown, Pennsylvania; from the collection of George S. Parker from Caxambras Foundation, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, sold at Sotheby's, New York, January 19, 2017, sale 2066, lot 76; currently, private collection.

The notice in the Sotheby's sale of 2017 that it was "descended in the family of the sitter" is true, but unarticulated in their sales catalogue. I wish to thank a descendant, Robert W. Sewall of Indianapolis, for kindly sharing his great knowledge, condensed and paraphrased below, of highly important aspects of the early provenance, which we can now trace continuously and with confidence all the way back to the sitter himself.

Rev. Joseph Sewall (1688-1769) had two children, Samuel (1715-1771), and a child Joseph, who was born on July 13, 1719 but who died in infancy. It is likely that Rev. Joseph Sewall's only surviving heir, Samuel, was the second owner. Indeed, we do know that the painting was in the dining room in the Boston residence of Samuel's son Joseph Sewall (1762-1850), who was, therefore, the grandson of Copley's sitter; that information about the picture being in that Boston dining room is stated in a letter from Henry Fisher Sewall (11 February 1895) of New York to Joseph S. Sewall of Saint Paul (see below), both of them grandsons of the Joseph Sewall who died in 1850. Next, by direct descent, the picture was likely in Boston the collection of that Joseph Sewall's son Thomas Robie Sewall, who was born in 1792 in Marblehead, Massachusetts and who died in 1864 in Boston, Massachusetts. Oral family history stated that the picture had been in his collection, and, supporting that, the picture is documented in the collection of Thomas's eldest child and only surviving son,

Joseph S. Sewall (1827-1917). Joseph left Boston in 1848 and, after residence in several places, arrived at St. Paul, Minnesota Territory, in 1854; he lived in St. Paul until his death in 1917. It is reasonable to assume that, after the death of Thomas Robie Sewall in 1864, the painting came to his son Joseph S. Sewall's collection in St. Paul, along with other family items. There is a surviving photograph (Ingersoll Photo, that is, Thomas W. Ingersoll's studio in St. Paul) from c. 1881-1884 (seen by this author, courtesy of Robert W. Sewall) showing Copley's portrait in the parlor of Joseph S. Sewall's home in St. Paul. The portrait remained there until 1917, when it was removed from the home by Joseph's daughter and son-in-law, Susan Winifred Sewall (1862-1942) and Walter Leeds Chapin (1863-1947) of St. Paul, in whose family it remained until sold out of their family by their son George Gilman Chapin (1888-1959) to the Robert B. Campbell Gallery in Boston. See above in this note for the provenance after that point, as provided by Sotheby's.

The earliest published photograph (1897) appears in Chamberlain, opp. page 212 (no location is given, but, as noted above, it was in St. Paul in the collection of Joseph S. Sewall at that time).

In Parker and Wheeler, 267, it is incorrectly stated that the portrait belonged to Thomas Roby [sic] Sewall in 1885; as we saw, at that point it had actually passed to his son, Joseph S. Sewall. Parker and Wheeler stated in their 1938 publication that "the present owner of the Hoit copy [see above] thinks that the original may have been burned," but that was obviously not the case; that owner, the Reverend Edgar L. Heermance of New Haven, Connecticut, did not know the location of the original. According to a newspaper account (Woburn News, May 1, 1897), some portrait of Joseph Sewall did burn on April 23, 1897 in Burlington, Massachusetts in the Samuel Sewall House, home of Martha Elizabeth Sewall Curtis (1858-1915); that destroyed picture seems to have been a copy of Copley's original in St. Paul. In the letter of 11 February 1895 cited above in this note, Henry Fisher Sewall, who had evidently seen both Copley's original and the picture in Burlington, stated his belief, with his underlines, that "the painting at Sam Sewall's in Burlington is a copy and not a Copley." In that letter, Henry mentioned another painting of the Reverend Sewall at his cousin Edmund's in Chicago (most likely Edmund Quincy Sewall Jr. [1818-1908]); the attribution and history of that now-untraced picture are unknown, although it was perhaps another copy of Copley's original as discussed here. The speculative question of whether that was another original by Copley is impossible to consider given the disappearance or loss of that picture said to be in Chicago.

4. A good biographical sketch appears in Shipton, 376-393. See also John Eliot, *A Biographical Dictionary* (Salem and Boston, 1809), 422-424. Eliot also served as the Corresponding Secretary of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

5. *Diary of Samuel Sewall*, in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Vol. V – Fifth Series* (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1888), 223-224; and Shipton, 376.

6. Samuel Sewall, *The Selling of Joseph* (Boston: Printed by Bartholomew Green and John Allen, 1700), 1.

7. Shipton, 377.
8. *Diary of Samuel Sewall*, 364, 369, and 374.
9. Hamilton Andrews Hill, *The Rev. Joseph Sewall: His Youth and Early Manhood* (Boston: David Clapp and Son, 1892), 3-7 [Reprinted from New-England Historical and Genealogical Register, vol. 46, January, 1892].
10. Joseph Sewall, *The Orphan's Best Legacy: or, God's Parental Care of Bereaved Children: A Discourse Occasion'd by the Death of the Honourable Samuel Sewall Esq* (Boston: Printed by B. Green, 1730), 5
11. Charles Chauncy, *A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of the Reverend Dr. Joseph Sewall: Late Colleague Pastor of the South-Church in Boston* (Boston: Printed and sold by Kneeland and Adams, in Milk-Street, 1769), 23-24.
12. Hill, 8 (his note 1).
13. Chauncy, 20.
14. Chauncy, 25.
15. Eliot, 423.
16. Eliot, 422-423.
17. Eliot, *A Biographical Dictionary*, 422.
18. Frances M. Smith, *Colonial Families of America* (New York: Frank Allaben Genealogical Company, 1909), 274.
19. Chauncy, 20.
20. Joseph Sewall, *A Caveat against Covetousness in a Sermon at the Lecture in Boston* (Boston: Printed by B. Green, 1718), 4-5.
21. Joseph Sewall, *A Sermon Preached at the Thursday-lecture in Boston, September 16, 1762. Before the Great and General Court of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New-England. On the Joyful News of the Reduction of the Havannah* (Boston; New-England: Printed by John Draper, 1762), 28.
22. See Richard H. Saunders, *John Smibert: Colonial America's First Portrait Painter* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995; A Barra Foundation Book), 71, 79, 92, and 166-167
23. See Andrew Oliver, "Peter Pelham (c. 1697-1751), Sometime Printmaker of Boston," in *Boston Prints and Printmakers, 1670-1775* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, distributed by the University Press of Virginia, 1973), 145, 147, and 171.
24. Eliot, 422.
25. For Mather's harsh assessment, see Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 385-386.
26. Chauncy, 22.
27. Eliot, 423.
28. Eliot, 424.
29. *Boston News-Letter*, Sept. 1, 1768, 1.
30. *Boston Evening-Post,* July 3, 1769 (unpaginated).
31. Chauncy, 26.
32. Prown, 101-202. *The Reverend Joseph Sewall* was not among the portraits in Prown's statistical lists and analyses.

33. See Prown, 127, for a chart of wealth showing other ministers listed in the bottom 10% or so of income among Copley's sitters.
34. Prown, 98.
35. Copley to West, November 12, 1766, *Letters & Papers*, 52. Writing that "I have been painting the head of a Decenting Cleargyman" implies that the picture was underway, but not yet completed. With such a restricted format, we can assume that the work was completed by year's end.
36. Copley to an unknown English mezzotinter, January 25, 1765, in *Letters & Papers*, 31-32. Prown, 56, thought that the date should be 1764, not 1765, although he called the date "c. 1765" elsewhere in his text (Prown, 98). The name of Joseph Sewall is sometimes spelled as "Sewell" in early documents.
37. "Proposals for Printing Dr. Sewell's Portrait," c. January 25, 1765, in *Letters & Papers*, 32. For the payment to Copley for the portrait, see note 2 above.
38. Copley to an unknown English mezzotinter, January 25, 1765, in *Letters & Papers*, 31.
39. Small to Copley, October 29, 1769, *Letters & Papers*, 77.
40. See Marjorie Shelley, "Painting in Crayon: The Pastels of John Singleton Copley," in Rebora and Staiti, 127-141.
41. See, for example, young Copley's *Forge of Vulcan* (private collection) and *Return of Neptune* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), in Rebora and Staiti, 166-170.
42. Reynolds' opinion was conveyed to Copley in letter of August 4, 1766, by American ship captain R. G. Bruce; see *Letters & Papers*, 41-42.
43. West to Copley, August 4, 1766, *Letters & Papers*, 44.
44. Copley to West, November 12, 1766, *Letters & Papers*, 50-51.
45. See Prown, 10, and Rebora and Staiti, 162, for discussion of young Copley's mezzotint of Reverend William Welsteed (1753). Based on an inscription on the print, it is possible that Copley had made an oil painting of Welsteed, although no such painting survives or is documented.
46. Copley to West, November 12, 1766, *Letters & Papers*, 52.
47. For discussions and illustrations of Copley's two large portraits of Hurd, see Rebora and Staiti, *John Singleton Copley in America*, 98 and 208-211. Copley painted a miniature of Hurd on copper, c. 1755-1758, listed as in private hands in Prown, 220, no. 69.
48. One example, surviving in two fragments, is Artwork no. 03.131, Special Collections, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Special Collections. Hurd added to the original plate the inscription "Ob. 27 June 1769 AETAT. 81," that is, "he departed on 27 June 1769 at the age of 81."
49. The sheet size is 9 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches. The plate size appears in the caption here.
50. Smith, 269-274.
51. For the quotes in this paragraph, see the letters to Copley by Benjamin West, June 20, 1767, and R.G. Bruce, June 25, 1767, *Letters & Papers*, 56-60. Copley kept trying, and sent several portraits to England in January 1768, "one in Crayons [pastel] the other in Oyl," as he wrote to Captain Bruce at that time (69). We do not

have a record of detailed feedback on those pictures, but West, September 20, 1768, offered Copley "general approval," saying that Copley had "nothing to Hazard in Comeing to this place;" see Letters & Papers, 72, and Prown, 59.