THE EDUCATION OF AN ARTIST: THE AMERICAN YEARS OF JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY, 1738-1774

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Abstract
The American years of John Singleton Copley have been all but ignored by earlier biographers. Rather, Copley's paintings have received the bulk of historical and critical attention. This study examines the artist's life and work within the context of his Colonial education. Education remains central in understanding Copley's American career.

In particular, Copley's education is explored in terms of his family life, boyhood years, and the educational environment of his household. Examination of Boston's public education system and its private schoolmasters suggests additional information contributing to his education.

Copley's education was furthered through his relationship with his step-father, Peter Pelham. Pelham was both a schoolmaster and an artist. In the world of Colonial art, self-education was imperative. Copley's portraits reflect the artist's self-educative skills, as well as the influences of indigenous Colonial technique. In his portraits, Copley transcended a superficial realism through exploring the character and personality of his subjects. His Colonial education appears in these revealing portraits.

His quest for a greater art education distinguished Copley's American years even after he achieved financial and artistic success. Copley's relationship with Henry Pelham, his half-brother and subject of the renowned Boy with Squirrel, can be better understood in the context of his educational aspirations. Copley's study of art history, architecture and philosophy reveal the artist's persevering desire for knowledge.

Colonial America provided John Singleton Copley an educational legacy which served him well.

Keywords
History, United States, Fine Arts

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THE EDUCATION OF AN ARTIST:
THE AMERICAN YEARS OF JOHN SINGLETON COLEY,
1738-1774

BY

Richard Klayman
B.A., Northeastern University, 1970

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

THE EDUCATION OF AN ARTIST:
THE AMERICAN YEARS OF JOHN SINGLETON COLEY,
1738-1774

by

RICHARD KLAYMAN

University of New Hampshire, December, 1981

The American years of John Singleton Copley have been all but ignored by earlier biographers. Rather, Copley's paintings have received the bulk of historical and critical attention. This study examines the artist's life and work within the context of his Colonial education. Education remains central in understanding Copley's American career.

In particular, Copley's education is explored in terms of his family life, boyhood years, and the educational environment of his household. Examination of Boston's public education system and its private schoolmasters suggests additional information contributing to his education.

Copley's education was furthered through his relationship with his step-father, Peter Pelham. Pelham was both a schoolmaster and an artist. In the world of Colonial art, self-education was imperative. Copley's portraits reflect the artist's self-educative skills, as well as the influences of indigenous Colonial technique. In his portraits, Copley transcended a superficial realism through exploring the character and personality of his subjects. His Colonial education appears in these revealing portraits.

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His quest for a greater art education distinguished Copley's American years even after he achieved financial and artistic success. Copley's relationship with Henry Pelham, his half-brother and subject of the renowned Boy with Squirrel, can be better understood in the context of his educational aspirations. Copley's study of art history, architecture and philosophy reveal the artist's persevering desire for knowledge.

Colonial America provided John Singleton Copley an educational legacy which served him well.
INTRODUCTION

At first glance, little in his genealogy suggests that John Singleton Copley was destined for artistic greatness. He was born on July 3, 1738, in Boston to Mary Singleton Copley and Richard Copley. The Copleys had emigrated from Ireland in about 1735.\(^1\) Settling on Long Wharf, the couple operated a small tobacco shop until Richard Copley's death.

Richard Copley's final estate was meager, consisting of tablecloths, an old desk, table, chairs, a skillet and a couple of candlesticks.\(^2\) Curiously included within this barebones inheritance were twelve bound books and six prints of pictures. The fact that the senior Copley possessed and bequeathed art prints suggests that he valued and even enjoyed pictures. Additionally portentous for young Copley was that Richard Copley's three-room living quarters, above the tobacco shop, were referred to as "the yellow chamber, the green chamber, and the kitchen."\(^3\) Based on the barebones bequest including books, art prints, and the color-designated rooms, one may speculate that Richard Copley imparted values and sensitivity about art to his son. Indeed, one can imagine the young lad gazing at the prints and absorbing the warmth of the brightly painted rooms.

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\(^2\) Suffolk County Court House, Boston, Massachusetts, Probate Court, Probate Number 8979.

\(^3\) Ibid.
On May 22, 1748, Mary Copley married the painter and mezzotintist, Peter Pelham. They made their home at "Lindel's Row, against the Quaker's Meeting House, near the upper end of King Street." Two rather unusual businesses were merged by the marriage. As a result, young Copley experienced not only the tobacco business, but the life of an "artist in his studio."

Three years after the marriage and after the birth of a child to the couple, Henry Pelham, Peter Pelham died. At the age of thirteen, John Singleton Copley inherited mezzotint tools, paints, and brushes to begin an independent art career.

It would appear that Mary Copley's contributions toward her sons' artistic development have gone unnoticed. She appears fleetingly in nearly all accounts of Copley's life. Even in Copley's letters to her, Copley was very much the concerned son reassuring her of his health, his diet, and his accommodations, and his activities. Years later when he learned of her death, Copley wrote glowingly of her kindness, vitality and importance to his artistic development. What of his debts to her concerning his art? Mary Copley shared an affinity with

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individuals sensitive to the arts; she married two such individuals. Further, she nurtured and reared John Singleton Copley as well as the artist Henry Pelham. In effect, she acted as wife and mother of one of America's earliest art families. Even with the death of her two husbands, she sustained the art ambitions of two children. Fortunately, Copley possessed an incredible totality of family support for his art. His family provided fertile ground for an art education. Undoubtedly, John Singleton Copley gained encouragement from his family to continue his stepfather's profession. The intellectual atmosphere of their humble home was unusual, and contributed to the indigenous training of the young artist.

This study maintains that a major theme of John Singleton Copley's American career was his quest for education. The historical and artistic influences that contributed to his educational development also contribute to our understanding of this Colonial artist. My contention is that Copley's education could have occurred only because of an indigenous tradition of Colonial art. His portraits epitomized these indigenous influences and must be analyzed in the context of Colonial culture. Chapter One examines the deficiencies of Copley scholarship, and particularly the absence of a historical synthesis regarding Copley's art or his life. Copley's boyhood and early education have been all but ignored by earlier biographers. Chapter Two explores the artist's Boston education in light of increasing historical interest concerning the Colonial family and public and private education.

In spite of numerous supportive influences in Copley's American years, the artist was frequently frustrated in his artistic development. Chapter Three analyzes the legacy of limitations confronting Copley and other Colonial portrait painters. In particular, the artist
confronted a society which offered limited concern for artistic development; the social status of the Colonial artist was, at best, ambivalent; and paltry financial rewards made the artist's existence problematical.

Specifically, this study argues that Copley's American career, from 1751 through 1774, exhibited a decidedly American style that I call Apparent Realism. Copley's portraits are rooted in the Colonial understanding of art fundamentals. Yet, he reinterprets and expands the sense of realism within Colonial art. Chapter Four examines Copley's technique through an analysis of his works contrasted with those of other Colonial artists. His technique grew out of his Colonial environment as did his early artistic education.

In 1766, Copley received international recognition from the British Royal Academy. His half-portrait of Henry Pelham, Boy with Squirrel, earned him membership to the Academy and, more importantly, the attention of Sir Joshua Reynolds and the American expatriate Benjamin West. The painting exhibits the techniques of Apparent Realism. It also provides clues and insights into Copley's affection for Pelham. Chapter Five explores a possible link between the two brothers. In a sense, the delicate portrait of Henry Pelham acted as a metaphor of Copley's own frailty.

Accompanying the acclaim of the Royal Academy were urgings that Copley undertake European study so as to perfect his abilities. Actually, the encouragement of Reynolds and West heightened his ambition to educate himself through studying the works of the masters. Calls for European travel, study and recognition alluded to greater opportunities than Copley could expect by remaining in Boston.
Chapter Six explains Copley’s interest in painting historical pictures. Copley believed that his artistic fame depended upon his ability to paint historical pictures. And yet, a market for historical paintings lay outside the scope of Colonial peoples so that his artistic goals proved unrealizable in the Colonies.

Chapter Seven examines the impact of Copley’s marriage upon his career, social status, and educational goals. His marriage contributed to his determination to advance his art education. Chapter Eight analyzes Copley’s decision to leave America in light of revolutionary activities in Boston. Although not a revolutionary, he was not a Tory; he was an artistic emigre.

In 1914, Professor Guernsey Jones of the University of Nebraska stumbled upon three bundles of letters located in the Public Record Office in London. These letters, in a condition of "utmost confusion," comprised the greater part of the letters and papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham. No one has ascertained how the correspondence came to rest in the British archives.

Subsequently, Jones published the letters through the Massachusetts Historical Society. As the Prefatory Note of the 1914 publication states, "The correspondence concerns Massachusetts before the date of Independence, and throws valuable light upon Copley and his early paintings." The Copley-Pelham correspondence provides much of the primary material for the following synthesis.

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8 Copley-Pelham Letters, p. xxii.
Although John Singleton Copley's American career has been treated by art historians and antiquarians, the results were invariably the same. For the most part, Copley's American portraits were catalogued by individuals who respected and praised his work. Beginning with Augustus Thorndike Perkins's *A Sketch of the Life and a List of the Works of John Singleton Copley* (Boston, 1873), the emphasis of Copley scholarship centered upon identifying Copley's paintings and their current holders. In 1915, Frank W. Bayley's *The Life and Works of John Singleton Copley: Founded on the Work of Augustus Thorndike Perkins* (Boston, Taylor Press) continued this approach. A more systematic analysis of Copley's American subjects was completed by 1938 by Barbara Neville Parker and Anne Bolling Wheeler and included 130 photographic plates.

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What characterized these histories and subsequent works was
the limited biographical effort employed for an understanding of Copley's
art or his life. Copley's American years, and especially his family
life and boyhood years, were perceived as unknowable.

By rehashing familiar biographical data, Copley scholars continued
to accept the limitations on understanding the events, circumstances,
and educational evolution of the artist. These scholars generalized
about his life, praised but barely scrutinized his pictures. In 1905,
Samuel Isham suggested that Copley "accepted the rather rigorous life
of Boston... and lived an honorable and successful, but... not
picturesque life." No definition of what the "picturesque" existence
might have been was offered by Isham. Nor was there documentation or
explanation by Isham of the following hypothesis:

It was his surroundings when a boy that turned him to
art, and he followed paintings, without enthusiasm, as the
most obvious means of earning a livelihood.4

No subsequent Copley scholar has suggested that Copley pursued his
career without enthusiasm nor how or why Isham reached such a specious
conclusion.

In 1929, Cuthbert Lee lauded Copley's portraits as "embodying the
very life and breadth of aristocratic New England," providing another
example of limited scholarship.5 Further, Lee hypothesized, "Copley's

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marriage must have been largely responsible for Copley's being received by the elite of Boston. . . ."⁶ Without attempting clarification of this idea, Lee asserted that "to his wife belongs part of the credit for his success, although it was well grounded before his marriage."⁷ Yet no additional details, documentation, or discussion were presented on the subject.⁸

At least part of this sketchy and superficial treatment of Copley's art and life can be attributed to the poor use of the collections of primary materials. In 1882, Copley's granddaughter, Martha Babcock Amory, published materials relating to the artist's travels and English life,⁹ entitled The Domestic and Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley, R.A. Two chapters are dedicated to Copley's American years. However, the book has been appropriately described as a "descendant's book, written

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⁶ Ibid., p. 54.
⁷ Ibid.
⁸ Isham, The History of American Painting, p. 30. Isham, however, does volunteer some tangential conjecture on the subject. "Copley's strongest personal trait seems to have been his family affection. It was not demonstrative. With his birth and training in colonial Boston that was not to have been expected, but he was a good son and a good husband, and he aided his half-brother to the best of his ability." Isham's conjecture that Copley was "not demonstrative," "not picturesque," and "without enthusiasm" are not substantiated.

in a rambling fashion and given to eulogy."\textsuperscript{10} Clearly, judgements concerning Copley's personality or artistic temperament require more than family tradition.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1904 The Letters and Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, 1739-1776 were published by the Massachusetts Historical Society. These documents have supplied Copley scholars with the artist's observations and statements about his art and life. James Thomas Flexner and Jules David Prown are the most important biographers to have made use of these records. Yet, existing biographical works have still fallen short on two counts. First, previous authors have all but ignored Copley's American years. However, the Copley-Pelham Letters are quite helpful for studying the American years and have been extensively used in this document. Secondly, earlier writers ignored Copley's overriding concern for artistic and educational advancement. It appears that Copley's education was the single most important force of his American years, providing unity and meaning to his life and art.

These deficiencies in Copley scholarship are remedied by a more thorough look at Copley's life and art. Remarkably, the element of historical synthesis has been woefully inadequate in Copley's


\textsuperscript{11} Augustus T. Perkins, A Sketch of the Life and a List of the Works of John Singleton Copley, p. 12. Perkins writes: "It is a well-founded tradition that he was as quiet and studious in his boyhood as he was conscientious and painstaking in his later years."
American years. A synthesis involving Copley's American portraits as well as the theme of his quest for education increases our understanding of the artist.

Copley's portraits satisfied the demands of his subjects in the context of eighteenth century realism. Yet, I maintain, Copley's portraits conveyed more than a superficial pose or expression or manner. Copley's pictures expressed the emotions, personalities, and nuances of Colonial life; his art revealed more than pictorial likeness and a slavish realism. As an artist, Copley was only half-heartedly concerned with realism. Previous historians have failed to synthesize ideas dominating Copley's life or his American pictures.

It remains with his portraits that we must begin our evaluation of the artist. An element of continuity which characterizes his American portraits is what I call Apparent Realism. Ever the artist, Copley's portraiture sought to explore what was unique about his subjects and how that uniqueness manifested itself before the artist. Portraiture for Copley was always an experiment, an attempt to portray a face and an existence as seen by the artist. Oliver Larkin's seminal work, Art and Life in America, suggests that the difference between Copley's work and that of other Colonial painters was Copley's perception:

Copley had proven that he owned the sharpest pair of eyes in colonial America, a brush that could search out the particular, and a visual excitability which would never wholly desert him.  

Larkins and other writers have taken this subject little further by pointing out that Copley was a unique and advanced artist. Now and

with what had Copley "proven... he owned the sharpest pair of eyes" capturing "the particular" vis-a-vis "a visual excitability?"\textsuperscript{13}

Copley's portraiture conveys the artist's search for education which makes sense out of an otherwise ambiguous personage. He sought to rise above portraiture by excelling at it and broadening it beyond facial reproductions. To do this, Copley wrenched from his subjects a kind of grandeur which was, he believed, the significance of his craft. This search by the artist transformed his pictures as it shaped his life. Copley believed that education would liberate him from a provincial existence as a mere portrayer of faces.

Larkins and contemporary historians have been extraordinarily perceptive when critiqueing Copley's American pictures. Nonetheless, art historians seldom assess how his life and social background influenced his artistic achievement during this period.

In Lloyd Goodrich's \textit{The Artist in America}, Goodrich stated that draftsmanship distinguished Copley's style.\textsuperscript{14} Similarly in Richard McLanathan's \textit{Art in America: A Brief History}, the author praises Copley's use of color, technical abilities, and artistic power.\textsuperscript{15} Both authors appear satisfied mentioning but an element of Copley's art while abandoning any effort of synthesis. Undoubtedly, Goodrich and McLanathan are prohibited from a deeper analysis by the fact that they are writing a survey

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Larkin, p. 60.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Lloyd Goodrich, ed., \textit{The Artist in America} (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), pp. 8-9.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Richard McLanathan, \textit{Art in America: A Brief History} (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovitch, 1973), p. 70.
\end{itemize}
of their works. And yet the social and intellectual historian must be disappointed with such limited scholarly endeavors. Copley's life as well as his pictures requires a more probing exposition.

Similar limitations are evident in the analysis of three other art historians who have critiqued Copley's art. George M. Cohen suggests that Copley's pictures possess a decidedly Colonial presence or distinctiveness. John McCoubrey notes a similar Colonial ambience to Copley's work. Not especially concerned with who Copley painted, Cohen and McCoubrey explored Copley's technique. Cohen and McCoubrey never satisfactorily explain the uniqueness of Copley's portraits or add to our understanding of his Colonial life.¹⁶

Equally unsatisfactory in appreciating Copley's art and life in the context of Colonial America is Kenneth Silverman's A Cultural History of the American Revolution. Silverman remains content rehashing familiar and frequently imprecise notions regarding Copley's style and artistic purpose.¹⁷ Again, no overarching synthesis has been offered so as to better understand Copley's pictures and his American years. This remains the central flaw of contemporary scholarship concerning Copley's Colonial career.

While modern scholars have transcended a concern for attribution, Copley's American years have been haphazardly examined. James Thomas Flexner's full length biography, John Singleton Copley (1948), developed from the author's earlier works on American painting. A complete section


on Copley was part of his *America's Old Masters* (New York, 1939).

In 1947, Flexner published the first of a series of works recording the history of American art, beginning with *American Painting: First Flowers of Our Wilderness*. The last two chapters discussed Copley's American career. A number of qualities of his scholarship on Copley help explain Flexner's significant contributions to the history of American painting. First, Flexner made extensive use of manuscript material including *The Letters and Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, 1739-1776* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1904); Copley's letters which were included and edited in Martha Babcock Amory's *The Domestic and Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley, R.A.* (Boston, 1882), and other Copley letters and references scattered in collections among the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Library of Congress, The Boston Public Library, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the New York Public Library. Flexner's use of primary materials raised the study of Copley to one of historical biography rather than a study of attribution. As a result, Flexner's biography was the first significant study attempting a broad multi-faceted analysis of Copley's life. The use of secondary work helped him explore the areas where his questions had led him. In addition, Flexner's vivid imagination re-created interesting aspects of Colonial life as well.

For example, Flexner sought to understand Copley's life on the Boston waterfront. He sought to probe Copley's personality and life on Boston's wharfs for the Copley family. Typically, Flexner explored Copley's life and Colonial existence through imaginative description.

Flanking Mrs. Copley's shop on Long Wharf were grog-shops which made the night hideous with the sound of drunken singing and drunken fights. We need not be surprised that Copley
reacted violently against his childhood environment. Induced by his own children to talk of those unhappy days, he told them that he had escaped from brutal reality into the recesses of his own mind; he became a quiet and studious lad. When the tough waterfront boys, seeing his pale face at the window, dared him to come out and hooted him as a sissy, he fled to an empty room, where he comforted himself by drawing pictures on the walls.  

Flexner was making reference to the work of Martha Babcock Amory in speculating on Copley's childhood drawing, yet because the documentation of Copley's childhood remains scanty, drawing upon this recollection by Mrs. Amory is necessary. However, it is the placement or context of this information which illustrates Flexner's approach. Flexner created an almost bawdy and brutal Boston environment with which to contrast Copley's more artistic and sensitive disposition. Going beyond instilling some local color in the biography, Flexner reconstructed a hostile environment made up of young toughs which threatened and even mocked the young Copley. Purposely, Flexner's use of his imagination was to provide a scenario to better appreciate the artist, using almost stereotyped situations as his guide. Flexner's use of imagination and his goal of humanizing the early life of Copley are effective, but there is an obvious historical weakness in Flexner's scholarship. Flexner does not ask the proper historical questions in better order to understand Copley's childhood. As is suggested in chapter four, the study of Copley's family, early education, and home life tell us about Copley's childhood. Characterizing Copley's early years in Boston as being "brutal" and tormented when other children "dared him to come out of his house and hooted him as a sissy" is more fanciful than  

meaningful. If Flexner meant to portray the hostile Boston environment to Copley or to his art, his approach does not succeed. However, Flexner's goal was probably more modest. Adding color to Copley's early life was the greater part of Flexner's intent.

Notwithstanding, Flexner's work on Copley has much to be said for it. Flexner is an artful writer. In combination with his vivid imagination, he provided both a popular book as well as a provocative account of the artist.

Had Copley, as he prepared to practice his craft, been enabled by some magic to read what I have just written, he would have been puzzled and quite possibly enraged at the way I have linked social to esthetic considerations. Flexner believed that Copley's American pictures were the product of an internal struggle: should they be reflective of their subjects' Colonial identities or should they "be made to look like lords and ladies" from the Old World? Flexner sought to examine the idea of what was different about Copley's Colonial portraits. Where did he learn his art? From what earlier Colonial artists did Copley receive his Colonial education? These ideas are well worth studying. They not only help us understand Copley, but let us better evaluate the history of painting as it developed in the American colonies.

Flexner posed numerous historical problems which deserved greater attention than even he provided. Yet he recognized the challenges in

19 James Flexner, Copley, p. 23.

20 Ibid. The imagination of Flexner is quite apparent when introducing this internal struggle: "There in his Boston painting room, he went through a personal temptation of Saint Anthony. His genius, the instincts that had been molded in Boston, were good angels urging him not to raise his eyes from the book of reality. But around him, so seductive, so full of glitter and charm, floated the aristocratic visions of the Old World" (p. 31).
a Copley biography and for American art history. In commenting
upon the Copley papers, Flexner stated, "The papers are so interesting
and voluminous that it is hard to understand why no modern writer
has made use of them in a biography of the great artist."\[21\] In a
slim 114 pages, Flexner's biography was ambitious in its scope, and
the source of great interest in Copley's art and education. Perhaps
the most severe objection to Flexner's work was the absence of a
significant theme in either assessing Copley's life or his artistic
achievements. In addition, a general absence of synthesis resulted
in a disjointed and fragmentary biography. Although Flexner's work
suggested a great deal about Colonial art, Copley's life, and
finally Copley's career, few satisfying answers emerged from Flexner's
scholarship.

In 1966 Jules David Prown published a two volume work, John
Singleton Copley, volume one on Copley's American years and volume two
on Copley in England. Prown believed that Copley scholarship was
weighted too heavily on his American years. "Since Copley lived
and painted for forty years in England, whereas only twenty-one of
his thirty-six years in the colonies were artistically productive,"
Prown noted, "this seems out of proportion."\[22\] Prown's interest in
Copley's English career actually began his work on the artist.\[23\]
Indeed, Prown maintains each of his volumes uses different scholarly
techniques appropriate to the study of Copley. In the study of Copley's

\[21\] James Flexner, Copley, p. 118.


\[23\] Ibid., p. ix.
English years, Prown draws upon "a wealth of primary source material."\(^{24}\) Public documents, newspaper reports, diaries, and the records of the Royal Academy make up the bulk of these sources. But, the study of Copley's American years, Prown believed, lacked historical information.\(^{25}\) As a result, Prown's study of Copley's American years rests in great part "on visual or stylistic analysis of objects /the surviving American portraits/, with particular emphasis on clarifying chronological sequence, informed by a supplementary analysis of available information about the paintings and the sitters."\(^{26}\) In ninety-one pages of text, Prown divided his study of Copley's American years into nine chapters with a brief introduction. The author's goals, as mentioned, are carried out in a well-written, finely researched document. Indeed, no more comprehensive work exists in accounting for Copley's American pictures. Prown's work catalogues, describes, and analyzes the "two hundred and forty individuals whose portraits were painted by Copley between 1753 and 1774. . . ."\(^{27}\) In addition, the author provides appendices including statistical data about Copley's subjects, a checklist of his American paintings, and 334 illustrations of the works of Copley, Smibert, Feke, Greenwood, Pelham and other artists bearing upon Copley's American years.

\(^{24}\)Ibid., p. 3.

\(^{25}\)Ibid. "... There are few records casting light on Copley's artistic activities in Boston. There were no public exhibitions attracting notice and reviews, no artistic organizations to leave historical footprints, and no townsman interested enough in artistic activities to keep informative journals. The basic historical facts about Copley's life in Boston are indeed meager."

\(^{26}\)Ibid., p. 4.

\(^{27}\)Ibid.
While Prown's work is broad in scope, focusing on Copley's American pictures, it remains limited to and by the traditional sources on Copley's life. As a result, Prown does not critically explore Copley as a child, or his family, or his early artistic education. The literature on these areas of Colonial life is becoming more extensive and lends itself to historical analysis. As an art historian Prown's primary concern was Copley's pictures. Yet for the historian, the social context of Copley's life requires a more probing effort. In particular, the historical family as well as public and private education in Boston should be used to uncover Copley's colonial milieu.

The absence of these considerations in any kind of synthesis characterized Prown's account. Other than extraordinary sensitivity to Copley's pictures and the chronology of his American years, little

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Ibid., pp. 7-14. Prown's first chapter on "Family, Childhood and Early Artistic Influence" is sketchy, brief, and explains very little of either the artist's family or childhood. In fact, barely a paragraph is offered on those subjects. Prown examines the admittedly limited sources but does not delve beyond a reporting of these facts. However, Prown's imagination becomes more alive when hypothesizing about Copley's artistic influences. Consider the following: "As any direct influence from Smibert, even Copley's earliest portraits indicate that he had already left Smibert's old-fashioned style bobbing in his wake. With the passion of any youth for le dernier cri, he picked up the stylistic thread where artists younger than Smibert, specifically Feke and Greenwood, left off. Except for a general awareness of Smibert's precedent in full-length portraiture and in the conservative convention for bust-length portraits of ministers in painted oval spandrels, the stylistic influence of the older generation on Copley was minimal. Still, the illustrious Smibert and his colleague, Peter Pelham, must have made a deep personal impression on the boy, as the two old friends told stories and reminisced about art and artists during the last few years of their lives" (p. 11).
substantial or even conjectural material appears. As a result, Copley's personality barely emerges. We simply do not know from Prown's account what made Copley an artist, a man, a husband. Only an attempt at a synthesis of historical and critical factors can allow a thorough exploration of these themes. Copley's education still remains as a central point for such analysis.

Yet it is in the realm of personal relationships that Prown's work is most wanting. During Copley's American years, the artist's relationship with his step-brother, Henry Pelham, and with his wife demand the historian's attention. Prown writes that "The portrait of Henry Pelham is one of the few pictures that Copley painted not on commission but for professional reasons." It is inferred that "Copley's impulse to achieve material success" and recognition would be realized in Europe. Toward this end, Pelham's portrait would serve as an example of Copley's work and artistic potential. As Prown

Prown's utilization of the Copley-Pelham Letters was either subordinate to or in conjunction with the chronology of Copley's pictures. Little effort was undertaken to explore these letters beyond this purpose, sustaining a limited interpretation of Copley study. Flexner observed that, "The Copley papers are so interesting and so voluminous that it is hard to understand why no modern writer has made use of them in a biography of the great artist" (John Singleton Copley, p. 118). Prown's work did not appreciably alter the validity of this observation.

The history of Copley scholarship tends to emphasize Copley's trip to the continent in terms of Copley's need for artistic growth. It is undoubtedly accurate that Copley sought artistic growth from European exposure, and this suggests his aspiring disposition. The point is, however, that a study of Copley's American years are filled with additional suggestive information about his life and education which can aid us in assessing the man and the artist.


Ibid., p. 47.
hypothesizes, "Copley decided on an experiment. He would paint a portrait and send it to London for exhibition at the Society of Artists." 33

How significant is this "experiment" in understanding Copley's intentions as an artist? Copley wished the portrait to be measured against European standards. Did he consider the work his best effort? Was there another painting, perhaps even a commissioned painting, which was superior and whose owner might consent (or, indeed, be honored?) to be part of a British exhibition? Finally, did Copley plan on painting a picture for the Society of Artists, and, if so, what made him select Pelham as his subject? The point is that a more in-depth analysis of Copley's choice of a subject provides a basis for expanding our knowledge of Copley's family, and the relationship as a teacher-mentor to Pelham.

Prown's hypothesis as to the "experiment" of Pelham's portrait is probably correct. But in and of itself, this hypothesis offers little which is new. In light of the intensity of Copley's concern for Pelham's upbringing, art career, and even physical safety, the Copley-Pelham relationship requires a more intense historical evaluation. The decision to paint Pelham's portrait, then, was of historical significance, but irrespective of its effect on Copley's career it was a decision which emanated from a deeply felt personal commitment. Prown appears unconcerned with formulating a hypothesis about Copley's personal life, and especially about Copley and Pelham.

Another element missing in such a hypothesis is Copley's marriage to Susanna ("Sukey") Clarke, viewed by Prown as a "milestone

33 Ibid.
in Copley's personal life as well as a turning point in his artistic
development."\(^{34}\) Prown states that the marriage advanced Copley's
"social ascent," as it accompanied other changes, especially Copley's
ownership of Mt. Pleasant.\(^{35}\) The question as to whether or not
Copley's marriage aided his social status is an important one. Its
answer could help explain aspects of Copley's social values and personal
aspirations. Whether his marriage aided his career is yet another
matter. Undoubtedly, Copley's abilities and not his marriage sustained
his practice.

Prown's observations about Copley's marriage and the artist's
social status are never explicitly stated in a question or a hypothesis.
As a result, ambiguity characterizes Copley's "changed" social condition.
In fact, as I will suggest, little social change resulted because of
the marriage. Copley's talent provided him social entry and social
acceptance.


\(^{35}\) Ibid., pp. 61-64. Prown suggests that Copley's marriage into
the Clarke family "triggered" a change in Copley's career, namely a
different "level" of patronage. By this, the author contends, Copley's
subjects were less "sitters of primary social prominence and more sitters
of political, professional, or fiscal importance" (p. 61). Prown does
not explain the cause or reasons behind this change. He does, however,
refer to the prominence of the Clarkes as a merchant family and the
family's loyalist politics. Prown's analysis of Copley's subjects re-
veals the following: "During his early years, 1753-61, Copley painted
a disproportionately high percentage of Tories (72%), while Whigs were
above the average in 1762-64 and 1768-70 (56%), the latter period notably
high in radical Whigs" (p. 131). Apparently, Copley's marriage into
a conservative and ultimately loyalist family did not hinder the artist
among more radical sitters. Prown does not attempt to interpret this
condition. In fact, these statistics probably suggest changes in Boston's
political elite. See Chapter 10, "The Intensification of Fractional
Politics," in Gary B. Nash's *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political
Yet Prown offers little about Copley's marriage, their personal relationship, or Sukey's relationship with Copley's family. The evidence is not abundant on these matters but there is some data including a family portrait, letters between Copley and his wife, and correspondence between Sukey and Pelham. Inferences about Copley's personal and family life can be made from these sources, and lend themselves to historical analysis. Particularly in the context of his education, Copley's marriage can be seen as another factor encouraging the artist's development.

In essence, Prown's volume on Copley's American years does little to satisfy the historian. He makes but a token effort to question, synthesize, or hypothesize on important ideas of Copley's formative years. However, Prown's research was first-rate and exhaustive. I found his Appendices consisting of statistical data of 240 portraits fascinating.

In 1970 Time-Life Books published The World of Copley, 1738-1815. It was written by Alfred Frankenstein and the Editors of Time-Life Books. H. W. Janson served as the consulting editor and Philip C. Beam, Chairman of the Department of Art and Professor of Archeology at Bowdoin College, also was a consultant on the book. In fact, the book was more concerned with the history of American art than with Copley. Copley's life in American and England was ably recounted, and his pictures are praised, especially "his unique gift for observing

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36 Jules David Prown, Copley. Vol. 1, p. 61. Prown states the following on the subject: "Copley's union with the attractive Sukey Clarke was a long and happy one, and the tranquility of his domestic life later provided a welcome shelter from the unpleasant battles and disappointments of his final years" (p. 62). Prown's statement does not address any specific aspect of the marriage, at least during Copley's American years.
unconscious personal mannerisms.  

Yet the work is excessively broad in its treatment of American art, seeking to include too many painters, too many kinds of painting, and extraneous discussions of furniture and architecture and wallpaper. The result is that Frankenstein's *World of Copley* makes no scholarly inroads in Copley study. It does, however, possess great popular appeal with its extensive art reproductions, use of close-up photography, and photographs of interesting memorabilia. The books is marred by a scanty bibliography and a penchant for journalistic writing.

The historiography on John Singleton Copley has been characterized by a singular interest in his paintings but an abiding ignorance of the artist. Yet, since Prown's biography, Copley study has nearly been silent. With the exception of James Thomas Flexner, Copley scholarship has remained in the realm of art history. Since Copley's paintings were all that anyone considered important, this was adequate and satisfactory.

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38 Ibid., pp. 46-58.

39 Ibid., p. 138. Among the more unusual pictures in the text is a copy of Brook Watson's family coat of arms. Frankenstein noted that "Above the shield he placed a crest showing Neptune about to plunge his trident into a shark resembling the one that Copley depicted depriving Watson of his leg. In the shield's upper left corner is the severed limb, superimposed over a heraldic bird."

40 Ibid., p. 7. Although the author derides mere journalism, Frankenstein's observations are just that. For example, Frankenstein refers to the old Boston phone exchange, Copley 2, as a link between the artist and his native city (p. 7).
This study of Copley's American years expands our understanding of a central theme in Copley's life: his art education. To do this, I have made comparisons and drawn inferences from an increasing body of material concerning the family, colonial education, and American social history. This measuring of Copley's life based on historical and artistic sources has provided a new perspective to Copley study.

A work which aided me in expanding my approach to Copley was Robert C. Alberts' biography of Benjamin West. Although Alberts offers only the usual information on Copley's American years, biography is an excellent analysis of West's art, career, personality, significance in American and British painting. It is important to note that Alberts suggests that the discovery of Joseph Farrington's diary required the re-evaluation of West as an artist and person. 42

Assessments of Copley's life in America have been sparingly offered. But as with West, when ideas about Copley's life, personality, or personal relationships have been suggested, they have been grounded in uninformed and unimaginative thinking. Fortunately for the study of West, the Farrington diary exposed the facts and separated them from the fiction surrounding West's life. 43 In my opinion, a historical analysis of Copley's American career, aided by an ever expanding historiography, helps to explain Copley's childhood, family relations, and his

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42 Robert C. Alberts, Benjamin West: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1978), pp. 203-209. Alberts described Farrington as a "scion of an old Lancashire family of means /who/ in 1785 was elected an R.A. . . . /although/ only a landscape painter — indeed, what was even lower in the professional scale, a 'topographical draughtsman' . . . ." (p. 203). Alberts notes: "... the eight volumes of the Farrington Diary published in the 1920's and the complete 7,000-page typescript of the entire diary made available in 1951 reveal a Benjamin West who is altogether different from the commonly accepted figure — one far more complex, much more human and humane" (p. 397).

43 Ibid., "Epilogue, the History of a Reputation," pp. 393-402.
artistic motivation. Only in the context of his educational development do Copley's American years explain his career and his life.
CHAPTER 2

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN HIS EARLY YEARS:
COPELY'S BOYHOOD

Just as Copley's painting style came from historically identifiable sources so did the elements of his early education derive from similarly specific origins. At least three specific phases of his early education require analysis. These include the family and the household's contribution to his education, the probability of at least some public school education, and finally the training he received as an apprentice to his stepfather, Peter Pelham. Each phase appears to help reconstruct Copley's educational development, while revealing the educational diversity within Colonial life. Although all Colonial children did not attend school, urban Colonial education, at least in Boston, included public and private instruction. Finally, this early period of Copley's education introduces the people and ideas which shaped Copley's American years as an artist.

Phase One: Early Family Education

Copley's family life has been treated by earlier biographers in a paradoxical fashion. His boyhood years, until about Peter Pelham's death in 1751, have been barely alluded to in any substantive way.1 It is alleged that little meaningful documentation exists which

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1James Flexner's 1948 study of Copley attempts an examination of Copley's environment as to understand his early years. Yet, Flexner was more concerned with a flamboyant discussion about Long Wharf's sailors and privateers and the primitive coarseness of Boston life. This
specifically addresses Copley's childhood, family life or education. Such an absence of documentation, at least on a par with the Copley-Pelham letters, has left a void over Copley's American years. What makes this especially troubling is that, nearly in the same breath, Copley's biographers allude to the meaning and importance of his education which occurred during these influential years. Why these years were particularly conducive to his growth as a man and artist is usually associated with a general recognition of the impressionability of childhood. Most concretely, Peter Pelham's relationship to his stepson is couched in terms of having inspired the young lad. Even further, Pelham's studio created the perfect artistic and educational environment. Here Copley became a most receptive art student.

While agreeing that Copley's early years bore significantly upon his educational and artistic aspirations, I hold that a substantial body of data exists from which we may better understand his American background served as a convenient foil to Copley's youth "sensitive" temperament (pp. 4-9). See also Flexner's earlier works, First Flowers of Our Wilderness (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947) and The Light of Distant Skies (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1954). Prown's 1966 biography suggests that Copley "must have had innate artistic talent and a strong natural inclination to express it" (p. 10, Vol. 1). Probably because of the lack of explicit documentation about Copley's early years, Prown leaves the subject at that. In 1967, Prown published an article which was derived from his 1966 work. Entitled "The Art Historian and the Computer: An Analysis of Copley's Patronage 1753-1774" (The Smithsonian Journal of History 4 Winter 1967: 17-30), Prown explained his statistical compilations of Copley's American subjects to better understand his American years. (See his biography, pp. 97-137, Vol. 1.) Copley's childhood and education received the usual fragmented treatment by Alfred Frankenstein and the Editors of Time-Life Books in The World of Copley, 1738-1815, pp. 37-40.

years. His family life lends itself to examination. In particular, recent historiographical work concerning the educational role of the Colonial family helps us explore Copley's boyhood. Additionally, his family life should be viewed within the context of ongoing educational developments within Colonial Boston, including apprenticeship and Boston's private and public schools. By expanding our vision of Copley's education, to include such areas for analysis, one may see why his early years were significant to his life and career.


Bernard Bailyn has written that "The history of the family is one of the most important threads in the whole fabric of cultural history; the historical role of education is inexplicable without reference to it."\(^5\) Similarly, Copley's career as an artist lacks continuity and cohesiveness without an effort to explain the kind of childhood education he received. Clearly, a more determined attempt at revealing his Colonial education requires that his family life be more fully explored.

Richard and Mary Copley's emigration to the Colonies was associated with that search for opportunity which distinguished the history of immigration. Other than their hopes and their labors, they did not appear to possess extraordinary skills or ambition.\(^6\)

In all probability, both Richard and Mary Copley operated their small tobacco shop at Long Wharf on the Boston port. Even after Richard's death, Mary continued as shopkeeper. On July 11, 1748, the following advertisement appeared testifying to her marriage to Peter Pelham and her continued shopkeeping activities.\(^7\)

Mrs. Mary Pelham (formerly the widow Copley, on the Long Wharf, Tobacconist) is removed from Lindel's Row, against the Quaker's Meeting House, near the upper end

\(^5\)Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society*, pp. 75-76.

\(^6\)Perhaps an adventurous element was in the blood of Richard Copley. No records of his death have been located. According to family tradition, Copley sailed to the West Indies after his son's birth and died there. See Martha Babcock Amory, *The Domestic and Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley, R.A.* (Boston, 1882), p. 2. The records in Boston's Suffolk County Courthouse reveal that Richard Copley, identified as a tobacconist, filed suit for 200 pounds against a mariner, James Hamilton. Copley had loaned Hamilton 180 pounds. On June 15, 1741, the court issued a summons to this effect. Early Court Records, Suffolk County Courthouse, Superior Court of Judicature, Boston, file no. 53765, vol. 345, fol. 133, July 1841, *Copley v. Hamilton*.

\(^7\)*Boston News-Letter*, July 11, 1748.
of Kind Street, Boston, where she continues to sell the best Virginia Tobacco, Cut, Pigtail and spun, of all Sorts, by Wholesale, or Retail, at the Cheapest Rates.

Whether it was because of a marital separation or Richard Copley's death, Copley's family was unusually small. Besides no brothers or sisters, no records testify to other or extended members of the family living in the Colonies. What can we deduce about Copley's family's size and structure? Can we gain a glimpse of his early education emanating from this family structure?


We must assume that young Copley was frequently at his mother's side: in their shop during the day, perhaps amusing himself by playing in a not too busy room; when their work day was done they experienced everything from everyday food preparation through moments of relaxation. At the least, the Copley household was inwardly focused. Mother and son's sense of survival, companionship and identities were inexorably connected.

These assumptions about Copley's family and childhood require a continued explanation. For example, Richard Copley's final will remains our only surviving document which dates during Copley's childhood.\(^\text{10}\) I believe that the document lends itself to specific hypotheses about his early education. Books and pictures were part of the family's environment; they must have been used to entertain and instruct the child. Particularly with an only child, the opportunity for shared moments of quiet reading must have existed. Family tradition suggests a similar interpretation. It was believed that Copley began drawing while in the nursery. Later in childhood he even sketched in his

\(^\text{10}\) Suffolk County Courthouse, Boston, Probate Court, Probate No. 8979. Richard Copley's estate consisted of the following items:

In the Yellow Chamber
- One Feather Bed, Boulster Curtains and two blankets
- One old Desk
- One Looking Glass
- Six Prints and Pictures
- Twelve Bound Books
- Three Table Cloths, Two Towels
- Six Old Chairs

In the Green Chamber
- One Suit of Green Curtains
- Two Chests
- One Quilt

In the Kitchen
- Six Dishes, Seven Plates Pewter
- One Spit
It was believed he was quiet, introspective and "loved to retire, unheeded, to muse over his own fancies."\textsuperscript{12}

No doubt Copley possessed a disposition to art at an early age. The fact that the household environment included pictures and books, too, adds some concreteness to family folklore about his early intellectual habits.

Let us again consider the family quarters consisting of the "yellow chamber, the green chamber, and the kitchen." These rooms were sufficient to carry on the family life and probably were quite amenable to study. There was also room for Copley to read or draw in the company of his parents or alone. This was an advantageous home situation, especially in terms of self-study and reflection.

For young Copley, his mother's marriage to Pelham was incredible good luck. Pelham was an industrious example of an artist; undoubtedly, he provided direction and focus for a precocious talent. But the marriage also suggests that Mary Copley found Pelham agreeable, presumably in his disposition, profession, and willingness to share her and her son's lives. Was she more lucky than her son? It seems to

\begin{itemize}
\item One Bell Mettle Skillet
\item One Brass Sauspan
\item Two Brass Candlesticks
\item Two Iron D° Old
\item Two Flat Irons
\item One Brass Skimmer
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{11}Amory, The Domestic and Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley, R.A., pp. 5-10.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 10. Amory, Copley's granddaughter, stated that from earliest childhood that Copley executed "coarse drawings." She also added that Copley and Henry Pelham "had a strong natural disposition for art. . . and this disposition undoubtedly had its influence on the home life of our artist" (p. 5).
me that more than luck promoted this relationship. I think it was quite conceivable that Mary Copley and Pelham sought companionship within a stable household. And she must have felt assured that he, Pelham, would serve quite well as a husband and stepfather. Pelham, too, must have felt assured that a problematical career as a mezzotintist and painter did not frighten Mary off. The consistency of Copley's early education was not exclusively rooted in his stepfather's studio, but rather in Mary Copley's preservation of their household. The education offered in the Copley household was not diminished by Mary's tobacconist activities or even by the absence of a husband. Because she sought to educate and "invest" in her son, John Singleton Copley enjoyed a hospitable educational environment.  

His family life was the foundation of his art and Colonial education.

**Phase Two: Copley and Boston's Public Schools**

In Colonial Boston, public schools served the educational needs of families seeking formal education for their children. By the mid-eighteenth century, Boston's public schools were a central part

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13 David Rothman, "A Note on the Study of the Colonial Family," The William and Mary Quarterly, Ser. 3, 123 (1966), p. 633. Rothman suggests that size of the Colonial family was probably smaller than it has generally been believed to have been. He points to recent studies in 17th century England by Lawrence Stone and Peter Laslett which suggest that this was the case. My concern regarding Copley's family in the eighteenth century was not so much its size as its strength of purpose, especially concerning education. Mary Copley's role in this regard was invaluable. In a similar sense, Rothman makes the following observation predicated on recent English and French scholarship: "The size of a household... is not related to the strength of the family. The emancipation of women and children is not identical with the disintegration of the family. The strength or solidarity of the family is not a function of the authority of the father or husband." (Rothman notes, on p. 633n, the work of Andre-Michel, "La Femme dans la Famille Francaise," Cahiers Internationaux, XII (Mar.-Apr. 1960), pp. 61-74.)
of the town's education. They supplemented education originating from the family as well as private school education. As I shall explain, Boston's schools provided basic instruction in addition to preparatory education for university bound students. The range of educational opportunity corresponded with the diverse economic background of Boston's population. As a result, the children of Colonial craftsmen, for example, availed themselves of these institutions, as did the children from even more humble backgrounds. The public schooling of Paul Revere and Benjamin Franklin help reveal the kind of schooling which John Singleton Copley probably received.

For example, Benjamin Franklin described his early education in the public schools:

14 Bernard Bailyn, Education in the Forming of American Society, pp. 26-27. Bailyn contended that the rise of the public schools paralleled a decline in importance of the Puritan family in the seventeenth century. He suggests the following: "The Puritans quite deliberately transferred the maimed functions of the family to formal instructional institutions, and in so doing not only endowed schools with a new importance but expanded their purpose beyond pragmatic vocationalism toward vaguer but more basic cultural goals" (p. 27). Edmund Morgan's Puritan Family interprets the rise of the school as related to the system of apprenticeship, as the more appropriate vehicle for education. For Morgan, the home's importance for education becomes less central by the late seventeenth century. James Axtell in The School Upon a Hill: Education and Society in Colonial New England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974) believes an orderly transfer of education occurred from the family to the schools in the early eighteenth century. Axtell contends this took place when "the field for individual economic opportunity (began) to enlarge" (p. 286). Robert Middlekauff's Ancients and Axioms: Secondary Education in Eighteenth Century New England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963) alludes to a similar religious to secular transformation which includes the public schools of Boston.
I was put to the grammar school at eight years of age, my father intending to devote me, as the tithe of his sons, to the service of the Church. My early readiness in learning to read (which must have been very early, as I do not remember when I could not read), and the opinion of all his friends that I should certainly make a good scholar, encouraged him in this purpose. My uncle Benjamin, too, approved of it, and proposed to give me all his shorthand volumes of sermons, I suppose as a stock to set up with, if I would learn his character. I continued, however, at the grammar school not quite one year, though in that time I had risen gradually from the middle of the class of that year to the head of it, in order to go with that into the third at the end of that year. But my father, in the meantime, from a view of the expense of a college education, which, having so large a family, he could not well afford, and the mean living many so educated were afterwards able to obtain — reasons that he gave to his friends in my hearing — altered his first intention, took me from the grammar school, and sent me to a school for writing and arithmetic kept by a then famous man, Mr. George Brownell.15

Even this education lasted only until Franklin was ten years old. Then he began his first job as an assistant in his father's tallow trade. It was on the job training which was the ultimate schooling for a tradesman, with Franklin's father serving as his feather.16

Since Franklin despised the trade of a tallow maker, his father attempted to acquaint him with a variety of trades more suitable to his liking. It is unlikely this element of choice existed in too many instances.

Another tradesman's education, Paul Revere's, appeared firmly targeted to a silversmith's craft. "It is not likely that Mr. Revere had any other ambition for his son than to make a good silversmith of him."17 Revere's education was somewhat typical. He attended

16 Ibid.
17 Forbes, Paul Revere and the World He Lived In, p. 27. Residents were encouraged to make a financial contribution to the schools, their financial condition permitting. See Boston Selectmen Minutes, May 9,
the North Writing School, located in a two-story, wooden building on Love Lane in the North End of Boston. Revere was instructed in reading and writing by the schoolmaster, Zachariah Hicks and John Proctor, serving as usher. The only expense that this education presented to the Revere family was in sharing the cost of heating the schoolhouse.

What may we infer about Copley's public school education in the light of Franklin's and Revere's education? The years most likely for Copley to have attended public school were between 1745, when he reached his seventh birthday, up until 1751, the time of Pelham's death. In this period, the public school system of Boston consisted of the following institutions: The South Grammar School located on School Street; the North Grammar School, on Bennett Street; the Writing School on Queen Street; the North Writing School on Love Lane; and the South Writing School on Common Street. These five schools were


18 Ibid., p. 28.

19 Ibid.

20 Boston Selectmen Minutes provide voluminous material on the public schools. Yearly visitations of the schools were scheduled. A select committee appointed by the selectmen observed the schools' operation, took a count of the number of students, and reported on the overall condition. See Robert Middlekauff's brief discussion of the Boston school inspection committees in his Ancients and Axioms: Secondary Education in Eighteenth Century New England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 54-57.
in continual operation from 1720 to 1789.\textsuperscript{21}

Considering that Mary Copley did not marry Pelham until May 22, 1748,\textsuperscript{22} it is conceivable that Copley, between the ages of seven and ten years, was sent to public school. For example, during these years Copley lived on Long Wharf. After her marriage to Pelham, Mary Copley and ten year old John resided at Pelham's house on "Lindel's Row, against the Quaker Meeting-House, near the Upper End of King Street. . . ."\textsuperscript{23} Long Wharf would probably indicate that Copley attended the Queen Street Writing School, being close to his residence and appropriate for a youth of humble origin.\textsuperscript{24}

Do existing records help us more tangibly place Copley in Boston's public schools? Examining Boston Records is laden with pitfalls. Specifically, the 1745 Selectmen's Minutes reveal that an inspection of the public schools was voted in March of that year to be carried out on June 25. A delegation of clergy and respected citizens was designated as part of the visitation assemblage. Yet,

\textsuperscript{21}Seybolt, \textit{The Public Schools of Colonial Boston}, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{22}Copley-Pelham Letters, p. 16 n. Also see Prown, \textit{Copley}, Vol. 1, p. 8.


\textsuperscript{24}For example, North Writing School was believed to be Paul Revere's school by Esther Forbes. "Boys intended for Harvard and the learned professions were sent to the Latin or grammar schools but most of those who (like Paul Revere) were to be artisans, went to the writing schools." Esther Forbes, \textit{Paul Revere and the World He Lived In}, p. 27.
no further account of the visit was recorded and no student attendance statistics were provided. The 1746 Selectmen's Minutes reveal that an inspection of the five public schools occurred on June 25, and the following attendance figures were submitted:

And found the South Grammar School wherein were One Hundred and Nine Scholars in very good Order, the South Writing School in the Common consisting of Two Hundred and Forty Scholars in like good Order, the Writing School in Queen Street of Sixty One Scholars, in good Order, the North Grammar School of Thirty-Five Scholars in Good Order, and the North Writing School were Five Hundred and Fifty Scholars in very good order.

This last statistic is obviously a clerical error. North Writing School statistics for 1747 were "Two Hundred and seventy-one Scholars in very good order" and in 1748 "The North Writing School wherein were Two Hundred and Seventy Scholars in good Order."

Regardless of missing or non-existent records, as well as clerical errors in existing ones, an average of 766 students attended the public schools between 1746 and 1748.

Boston's overall population was over 15,000 at this time.

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26 Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, June 25, 1746.

27 Seybolt, Public Schools, Appendix D.

28 Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, June 19, 1747.

29 Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, June 29, 1748.

30 Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, correcting the 1746 enrollment of the North Writing School from 550 to 250, overall public school enrollment was 795 students. For 1747, enrollment was 748 students, and in 1748 enrollment tallied 755 students.

Even considering private school enrollment in the town, formal schooling was not universal.

In addition, the philosophy of the public schools was inviting and comprehensive, belying the small enrollment statistics. Residents of Boston paid no mandatory fees for their children's schooling. 32 Certainly, Copley's widowed mother would not be expected to pay any fee for public schooling. (When an isolated problem over payment did occur, in 1741, the Boston Selectmen ordered John Proctor, Master of the North Writing School, to appear before them:

... upon the Complaint of his refusing to take Children of some families of low Circumstances in the World, and insisting on large Demands for Firing and Entry Money -- to which the Informed that as to Firing, he had not more than Five Shillings a piece, one with another (some Paying and some not Paying) and as of Entry Money, he has not Demanded any of the Town Inhabitants. . . . 33)

Clearly, the philosophy of the Boston public schools was to provide

32 Seybolt, The Public Schools, p. 41. "A small fee for fire-wood, called 'firing' or 'fire-money' was expected of residents whose 'circumstances' permitted." It was not demanded by town regulations, however.

33 Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, April 15, 1741. Debate over how Boston should meet its school expenses continued. The Selectmen appointed a committee to investigate the school's budget and other city expenditures on March 12, 1750. This report was issued at the Town Meeting of May 14, 1751. Among the committee's recommendations as the following pertaining to the public schools: "That the Charge of supporting the several Publick Schools amounted the last Year to more than 1/3 part of the whole Sum drawn from the Selectmen. . . . the Committee cannot be of Opinion that any Saving can be made to Advantage. . . except the Town should think it expedient to come into Methods to oblige such of the Inhabitants who send their Children to the Publick Schools and are able to Pay for their Education. . . the Town (assess) some reasonable Sum upon them for that purpose." The committee's recommendation was defeated by the Selectmen. Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, May 14, 1751. On the other hand, the absence of public support characterized the education of eighteenth century New York; according to Carl Kaestle, informal and unregulated schooling met New York's needs. See his The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750-1850 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973, Ch. 1).
accessibility to rich and poor children of the town. Copley's potential for public school education was not limited by his family's financial circumstances; indeed, the public schools encouraged the education of such individuals.

The philosophy of the school was clear

"...The Masters of the Publick Grammar Schools and Writing Schools in the Town be directed not to refuse taking into their respective Schools, any Child or Children that may be brought to 'em for Education, in case Entrance money (so called) is not paid said Masters, and also that they shall not demand any Pay or Allowance for Instructing such Children. . . ."

As with Paul Revere's education, "the Expense for Firing," might be received of those students who could afford the contribution. 35

The town records do not include names of students attending the public schools. I believe, however, that sufficient information exists for us to hypothesize that Copley was a student between 1745 and 1748. The purpose of the public schools was tailored for just such an individual,

Our free schools seem to have been interested for the Benefit of the Poor and the Rich; that the Children of all, partaking of equal Advantages and being placed upon an Equal Footing, no distinction might be made among them in the Schools on account of the different Circumstances of their Parents, but that the Capacity and natural Genius of each might be cultivated & improved for the future benefit of the whole Community. 36

34 Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, May 14, 1751

35 Ibid. Ultimately, this potential charge was not allowed. See Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, April 5, 1784: "Voted that the practice of Schoolmasters in receiving Entrance & Fire Money (so called) be abolished as inconsistent with that Freedom of Education which was originally intended in the Institution of the Publick Schools." Such a liberal policy was probably the exception, especially in rural New England schools. See James Axtell, The School Upon a Hill: Education and Society in Colonial New England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974, pp. 171-173).

36 Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, April 5, 1784.
Copley's educational opportunities were not overly subtle or extraneous, being the son of a tobacconist or as the adopted son of a mezzotintist. His public schooling served as a foundation for the specialized craftsman training Pelham provided. In reconstructing Copley's boyhood education, we must understand the urban school and the Colonial craftsman. By doing so we can appreciate the the broader relationship of American education to Colonial life.

Copley's educational program ought not to be perceived as one which offered extraordinary or unheard of opportunities. The writing school curriculum was basic: reading, writing, and arithmetic. Indeed, the ability to read was considered a family responsibility as well as a prerequisite for school admission. In addition, the Selectmen instructed the masters "That the Scholars be Catechized every Saturday after the form of the Assemblyes Catechism."

The public grammar schools educated boys intended for the university and a professional career, and beyond Copley's expectations. The curriculum was, according to Samuel Eliot Morison, "a pretty stiff and thorough classical course." In the first three years, students learned an "Accidence" or beginning Latin, in addition to the "Nomenclator," a Latin-English phrasebook as well as vocabulary in Sententiae Pueriles. Morison detailed the curriculum for the Boston Latin school as of 1712: "For construing and parsing, the Distielia

37 Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, April 15, 1741. "Mr. John Proctor... refus'd none of the Inhabitants Children, but such as could not Read in the Psalter."

38 Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, May 25, 1719.


40 Ibid., p. 105. Town records for 1710 and 1711 suggest that
attributed to Dionysius-Cato, a collection of maxims popular since the early Christian era, was used. Corderius' Colloquies and Aesop's Fables were also used, in Latin. Fourth year began Erasmus' Colloquies, continued Aesop, studied Latin grammar, and read Ovid de Tristibus. Fifth year continued Erasmus and Ovid, included the Metamorphoses and began Cicero's Epistolae, Latin prosody, and Latin composition with Garretson's English Exercises for School Boys to Translate. Sixth-year scholars began Cicero de Officiis, Lucius Florus, Virgin's Aeneid, and Thomas Godwyn's excellent English treatise on Roman history and antiquities which had been used at the University of Cambridge in John Harvard's day; they continued the Metamorphoses, made Latin verse, dialogue, and letters, and began Greek and Rhetoric.

During the seventh and last year, the boys, now fourteen to sixteen years old, began Cicero's Orations, Justin, Virgil, Horace, Juvenal, and Persius, made Latin dialogues, and turned 'a Psalm or something Divine' into Latin verse, with a Latin theme every fortnight. For Greek, they read Homer, Isocrates, Hesiod, and the New Testament."

The goal of the grammar school curriculum was to acquaint the student with classical literature and authors, as well as to promote the mastery of Latin and Greek. Religion played a rather subordinate role in the curriculum. As a result of such a program of study, the student would be prepared for "a further Degree of Education; whereby certain Selectmen objected to the method of instructing Latin in the grammar school. See Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, March 13, 1710-11.

Undoubtedly, Copley did not receive a grammar school education. Classical literature and languages were quite removed from the employment expectations of the tobacco shop and Peter Pelham's studio. For the most part, artisans conceived of education as a practical tool, specifically in terms of perfecting their skills. And yet, Copley's fascination for travel, and his interest in mythology, history, and philosophy indicate an appreciation for the world of ideas. While he did not attend the grammar school, he was still a product of the town's commitment to the educational opportunity. Seen as an ongoing process, Copley's educational expectations did not preclude the kind of education

42 Robert Seybolt, The Public Schools, p. 76, quoting an April 5, 1784 Boston town report. Morison makes a similar inference as regards the purpose for establishing Harvard: "... the advancement and perpetuation of learning were the broad and ultimate objects of the foundation; the education of ministers was the immediate purpose, the fear of an illiterate clergy was the dynamic motive." Samuel Eliot Morison, The Founding of Harvard College (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 247. Also, see Clifford K. Shipton's "Secondary Education in the Puritan Colonies," New England Quarterly, VIII (December, 1934), pp. 655-658. Shipton maintains that an increased secularism diminished the clergy's impact on the curriculum.


which the grammar school offered. Not in a classroom but through self-education, travel, and in a first hand study of Western art would he one day experience the grammar school curriculum.

In summary, the certainty that Copley attended the public schools of Boston cannot be decided by existing public records or Copley's writings. Yet the hypothesis of his attendance becomes believable as we better understand Copley's home life and his family's educational goals for him. Additionally, his public schooling is predicated on the educational environment of Colonial Boston and the shared experiences of the town's school age children. Copley fit the pattern of a school age child who was receptive to such an educational experience.

Phase Three: Copley and Boston's Private Schools

There never was a doubt that John Singleton Copley would continue the craft of his stepfather. Family tradition had it that Copley possessed artistic talent and inclinations even before Peter Pelham appeared. At Pelham's death, in 1751, Copley was about twelve years old. Since 1748, Copley studied what would be the mezzotint and artist's craft. Copley wholeheartedly embraced his art career; he accepted the


46 Martha Babcock Amory, The Domestic and Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley, R.A., p. 5.

occupation of his stepfather because few, if any, alternative careers presented themselves. 48 Most significantly, Copley's art career grew instinctively and, undoubtedly, was encouraged through Pelham's example. 49

The central educational responsibility of the Colonial family was to transmit the "Art and Mistery" of the craft from father to son. Carl Bridenbaugh noted, in a study of a wide variety of colonial craftsmen, that specialization within a craft characterized the approach of the Colonial urban family. Rapid population increases in urban areas multiplied the domestic home market. As a result, the financial "prospects for urban artisans looked more promising each decade." Additionally, since the economic system, as a whole, was characterized by a division of labor, the urban craftsman was in increasing demand. 50

Through the family, the "Art and Mistery" of a craft could be learned and assured of being continued. 51 Continuity of the craft did not preclude

48 In his study of seventeenth century Plymouth, Demos concluded that a limited occupational range influenced the son of an artisan to adopt his father's craft. He noted that "... the artisan class (was) relatively small, and the vast majority of the populace was engaged in simple farming. In the typical case, therefore, the choice of a calling was scarcely a choice at all; instead, it was something assumed, something everywhere implicit in the child's surroundings and in the whole process of growth." (Demos, A Little Commonwealth, p. 147) This analysis echoes what was Copley's experience.

49 Ibid., p. 150. Copley's art career was also characterized by an absence of an "awkward age." The concept of rebellion against his mother or stepfather would have been alien to him. See Joseph F. Kett, Rites of Passages: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present (New York: Basic Books, 1977) Chapter One. Finally, I believe the cohesiveness of the Copley household precluded a sending away of the children to learn a craft, as Edmund Morgan hypothesizes. (See his The Puritan Family Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth Century New England (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 71-80.


51 Ibid., p. 66.
a son from leaving the town of his father. As Oscar Handlin observed, an early assumption of one's craft "forced a child to be a man." 52

Copley's years with Peter Pelham, years which possessed many of the educational aspects of an apprenticeship, comprised the third phase of his early education. It is clear that Pelham had much to teach about his mezzotint and painting craft. How inspired young Copley must have been, especially by the flurry of commissions Pelham received in 1750 and 1751! 53 His work included five portraits and seven mezzotint engravings. 54

However, Copley probably learned even more than painting and mezzotint from Pelham. Pelham conducted classes as part of his private school activities. On December 28, 1737, the Boston Selectmen's Minutes reveal the following:

Mr. Peter Pelham presented a Petition, Praying for Liberty to Open a School in this Town for the Education of Children in Reading, Writing, Needlework, Dancing and the Art of Painting Upon Glass. 55

Thus Pelham offered his stepson expertise in a craft as well as in


54 Ibid. See Chapter Three in this work entitled "A Legacy of Limitations. Social Status and Artistic Growth." Also, Oscar Handlin, Facing Life, pp. 33-35.

55 Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, December 28, 1737. Pelham's curriculum was diversified. Other schools, especially in relation to the arts, possessed a sharper focus. For example, on October 5, 1754, the Selectmen granted "James Duke with his Wife from Barbadoes be admitted Inhabitants of this Town and that he have Liberty to Open a School in this Town for teaching Children to Dance and for his Wife teaching needle Work to Children."
more general education. 56

Private schools were numerous in Boston, they supplemented a town's public facilities, usually accepting paying students of any age. 57 The particular expertise of the private school teacher was evident in the teacher's newspaper advertisements.

This is to Notify any young Gentlemen who are desirous to learn the French Tongue. . . . If any young Ladies are curious of Learning that Language, they will find ready to wait on Them said House, at what Hour they please. . . . 58

Instruction in languages, voice, advanced mathematics, and countless other subjects were offered at all hours of the day. Few teachers tried harder to attract a student population than Peter Pelham. 59 By 1742, Pelham hoped to increased his private school business.

56 Two of Pelham's children from a previous marriage also served as private teachers. In 1743, Peter Pelham, Jr. advertised in the Boston Examining Post as a "Tutor. . . on the Harpsicord or Spinnet. . . (and) to Teach The Rudiments of Psalmody, Hymns, Anthems." In 1754, Charles Pelham notified the public he had opened a dancing school. See Robert F. Seybolt, The Private Schools of Colonial Boston (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 31 and p. 39.

57 Bremner, Children and Youth, Vol. I, p. 82. Also Robert Francis Seybolt, The Private Schools of Colonial Boston, pp. 3-10. Seybolt noted that girls and boys of any age were welcome in the private schools. In general, private school education frequently was occupationally oriented, technically oriented, or meeting other educational needs the public schools did not address. See Clifford K. Shipton, "The Secondary Education in the Puritan Colonies," New England Quarterly 7 (December, 1934), p. 658.

58 Seybolt, The Private Schools of Colonial Boston, p. 23.

This is to inform those that are employ'd in Affairs and Business in the Day Time, that they may be taught Reading, Writing and Arithmetick, in the Evening by Mr. Peter Pelham, at his School near King-Street in Boston. Attend will be given from Candle-light till Nine, for the Six ensuing Months.60

No mention of instruction for dancing or art appears in Pelham's evening school advertisements. The clientele for evening instruction was probably more practical minded, being interested in supplementing or enhancing basic skills.61

Because of Peter Pelham, Copley received both a general education as well as an apprenticeship in the arts. The advantages of such close instruction were very much for a purpose: specifically to teach Copley enough about Pelham's mezzotint and painting skills so that young Copley could make a living for himself. Had Copley not sufficiently mastered his art he possibly would have become a lifelong teacher.62

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60 Seybolt, The Private Schools, p. 29.


62 Pelham's death left his son in need of a versatile art instructor. Boston Selectmen Minutes from 1736 to Pelham's death in 1751 issued no approval of petitions for art instruction. Usually, painting instruction was combined with quill-work or embroidering. See Boston Selectmen's Minutes, Oct. 5, 1743. A newspaper advertisement announced
Peter Pelham's career as a private schoolmaster supplemented his income as a mezzotintist and painter, as it also added to Mary Copley's tobacconist income. No documentation exists revealing who Pelham's students were or what instruction they actually received.

Pelham and the vast majority of private schoolmasters performed their jobs to satisfaction and a high degree of professionalism. Certainly, Pelham's training, experience, and performance as a practicing artist attest to a high degree of competence.

Copley's career demonstrated a number of educational habits and attitudes which, I believe, emanate from Pelham's legacy. Most crucially, Copley's literacy was of the highest calibre. As I explained, Copley poured over his stepfather's volumes on history, art, and phil-

that "Mrs. Hille r designs to open a boarding school . . . (teaching) Wax-Work, Transparent and Filligree, Painting upon Glass, Japanning, Quill-Work, Feather Work, and Embroidering with Gold and Silver. . . ." Boston Evening Post, Feb. 1, 8, 15, 1747-48. Also Boston Evening Post, April 9, 16, 1753; The Boston Gazette or Weekly Journal, May 31, 1756 in Seybolt, The Private Schools, pp. 32-33. Jules Prown dates the start of Copley's career in 1753 (John Singleton Copley, Vol. 1, p. 15) thus giving Copley the opportunity to provide art instruction had he so desired. The records of the Boston Selectmen reveal that not all painters were welcome. William Pelsne, "a Painter from Salem is come into this Town from thence being a Person of Bad Character. Ordered that Mr. Savell Warn Him out of Town." Boston Selectmen's Minutes, Oct. 6, Oct. 25, Nov. 3, 1742.


64 There was an occasional case of a public school student protesting to the Boston Selectmen. At a meeting of the Selectmen, September 29, 1770, "Mr. Thomas Parker entered a Complaint against Mr. Samuel Holbrook, master of the South Writing School, for giving his Son as he says an unreasonable Correction." Boston Records, Selectmen's Minutes, Sept. 29, 1770. A check of the Selectmen's Minutes from 1732 to 1776 record this single case in the public schools without similar cases involving private teachers.
osophy. He was taught the ability to teach himself. Self-education was a central theme in his American life and a source of his motivation for what he sought to accomplish as an artist. Pelham must be seen as the embodiment of private Colonial education and as a central figure in Copley's self-education.

In addition, Copley was a bit of a pedagogue himself. Incessantly, he instructed Henry Pelham on painting and the business of an art career. Peter Pelham's instructions to Copley probably re-appear in Henry Pelham's art education. Copley's relationship with his stepbrother was broadly based. They shared a love of art with Copley acting as teacher, and master of the craft. The education which Copley and Henry Pelham received emanated from the same Colonial legacy: the home, the urban public school, and the private schoolmaster.

What do these hypotheses regarding Copley's childhood and early education tell us? By reconstructing his early education, how are we better able to understand him as a man and an artist? Why is the theme of education so important in understanding Copley's American years?

I believe that Copley's early education reveals some fundamental insights about the artist. Indeed, his early education impressed him with the fact that the study of art was a lifelong process. As an artist in the Colonies, self-study was as indispensable as it was humbling.

Self-study was crucial, especially since Copley was not a child prodigy. On the contrary, he needed all the educational opportunities which, fortunately for him, existed. Granted that he possessed a

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65 See Chapter Six in this work entitled, "Seeking a Larger Stage: Copley and History Painting."
propensity toward drawing. Pelham's entry into his life was pivotal and serendipitous. But by themselves, these elements of chance would not have produced America's greatest Colonial portrait painter.

Copley was nurtured in a home which prized learning, and there his abilities in reading and writing developed. Copley's quest for knowledge, especially in his early years, culminated in Pelham's studio. Copley's intellectual curiosity was well established long before his mother married Pelham. The point is that Copley's early education had its source in the Colonial family as well as in Colonial Boston. As a young boy, he needed each of his educational experiences. What is crucial in understanding Copley's entire career is that he possessed an unsuspected educational background.

Unlike the Colonial childhood of Benjamin West, Copley was not a prodigy. Copley learned that self-education would distinguish what-

66 Benjamin West's first biographer was John Galt. Galt's two volume The Life, Studies and Works of Benjamin West, Esq., President of the Royal Academy of London. Composed from Materials furnished by Himself contains stories which reveal West as a child prodigy. Although the validity of such stories cannot be validated, West's most recent biographer, Robert C. Alberts, suggests that Galt's stories were credible if sometimes exaggerated. (Robert C. Alberts, Benjamin West: A Biography/Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978/, pp. 10, 11, 409-412). How regrettable that Copley did not have a John Galt to record the simple but revealing stories of childhood. The following is a brief example of such a story as told by Galt:

His drawings at length attracted the attention of neighbours; and some of them happening to regret that the artist had no pencils (paintbrush), he enquired what kind of things these were, and they were described to him as small brushes made of camels' hair fastened in a quill. As there were, however, no camels in America, he could not think of any substitute, till he happened to cast his eyes on a black cat, the favorite of his father; when, in the tapering fur of her tail, he discovered the means of supplying what he wanted. He immediately armed himself with his mother's scissors, and laying hold of Grimalkin with all due caution, and a proper attention to her feelings, cut off the fur
ever talents he possessed. A central theme of Copley's American years was his belief that his level or degree of education would determine his European acclaim. He learned to be a painter; only with greater learning, he thought, could he be considered among Europe's most accomplished artists.

Secondly, Copley viewed his education as ongoing. He was conscious of his parents' educational efforts in his behalf. Indeed, he preached the necessity of continual education when he tutored Henry Pelham. In a sense, Copley expanded his art knowledge by teaching Pelham; very consciously, he studied history, art, and philosophy so as to accelerate and enrich this education.

What disturbed Copley about his colonial life and Colonial art was the fear that his learning would stop. He recognized that self-education might give way to complacency. He feared that Colonial tastes solely for portraiture would limit his art, as it might his ambitions. Such a thought was threatening. Internally, Copley struggled to continue his educational aspirations. He was conscious of the advances he had made and perhaps he was concerned about his power to persevere.

67 Copley served Henry Pelham as a tutor, advisor, and trusted confidant. See the chapter, Boy with Squirrel: A Clue in the Copley-Pelham Relationship.
The most salient observation about Copley's boyhood education is that he was encouraged to pursue an artist's career. As a result, he was extraordinarily confident that he could master his craft. His decision to submit Henry Pelham's portrait to the Royal Academy reflected his confidence. Clearly, Copley was determined.

Where did he gain such confidence but in his home, in his early education, in his apprenticeship under Pelham, and ultimately in his own compositions. Only his convictions about his abilities could have sustained this steadfastness of purpose. His three hundred and fifty portraits attest to an ability of portraying individuality and uniqueness of person. Surely, this was the work of a self-assured professional.

Copley's childhood enthusiasm for learning was similar to that of Benjamin West. West spoke of a "fire in my breast which has never been extinguished." Equally committed to art was Copley, as his American career illustrates. His early education advanced his art interests and remains a key element in understanding his later artistic influences and triumphs.

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68 Early Portraits in Rhode Island, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, R.I., 1967. In the introduction, William B. Stekens, Jr. made the following observation which echo Copley's situation: "Portraits of the successful colonists show a determined and inherently strong people whose emotions ran close to the surface. The depictions were the work of artists equally direct in character and method."

69 Alberts, Benjamin West, p. 16.
CHAPTER 3

A LEGACY OF LIMITATIONS:
SOCIAL STATUS AND ARTISTIC GROWTH

Copley and his Colonial predecessors painted in an age of limited artistic institutions in England as well as in the American Colonies. The first British Academy of the Arts was founded in 1711 by Godfrey Kneller. While the Academy provided a meeting place for an exchange of ideas and techniques, the social status of the artist remained low, and painting as a livelihood was frowned upon. In 1768, the Royal Academy was chartered, thanks to the efforts of the American artist, Benjamin West.¹ Still, what characterized eighteenth century artistic institutions was their instability and their promotion of conformity.²

Nonetheless, West specifically referred to London as the art center of Europe.

The arts Continue to receive great in Corragement. To London at present seems to be the only place in Europe where a man is rewarded for his productions in the Art of painting.³

Actually, British artistic traditions were still in a formative stage by the late eighteenth century. Aside from Hogarth and Dutch landscape painting, British art received little popular attention. Indeed, it

was not until the 1790s that art reviews regularly appeared in the British press. 4

The occupational status of the Colonial American portrait painter in the eighteenth century was that of a craftsman rather than an artist. Early artists survived by portrait painting as well as house painting, sign painting, coach painting, and any other work the brush and man could master. A painter could realize his financial needs by completely serving the decorative duties of Colonial life, and survival often dictated that not only artistic skills be developed but entrepreneurial skills, too. 5

Yet, what was significant about the social status of Colonial artists such as Peter Pelham, Smibert, Feke and Copley was their access to upper-class gentlemen and families. For example, Peter Pelham was the son of a Gentleman "according to the records of the church of St. Giles in the Field," London, probably an individual of good manners and company.

In 1727 or 1728, he engraved a mezzotint of Cotton Mather from a portrait that he also painted. Pelham's social status exhibited a fluidity that might be characterized as societal "acceptance." His extant works, at least, imply such a possibility. 6

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Mezzotints of the clergy accounted for much of his business, probably because of the demand such prints could engender among the local congregation.

Yet Pelham's precarious finances in the Colonies typified the difficulties of an artist's dependence solely upon his art. Thus, he advertised his services as an instructor in "... Reading, Writing, Needlework, Dancing and the Art of Painting upon Glass." Indeed, Boston's foremost portrait painter, the Scotsman John Smibert, who had

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resided in Boston since 1729, painted portraits in his shop located in "what became Scollay Square." In addition, he sponsored exhibits, displayed prints and plaster casts of ancient sculptures, and sold art supplies. Smibert's and Pelham's careers testified to the fact that social access alone could not put bread upon their families' tables.

The social status of Robert Feke illustrated a more perplexing relationship between subjects and artist. One of Feke's earliest chroniclers, W. Casey Poland, suggested that Feke was a wandering sailor and artist. Sea voyages, Poland wrote, made up a part of Feke's life that especially led him to travel, study painting styles, and dabble in portrait work. While such a hypothesis might account for his sophisticated artistic talents as well as his urbane subjects, the theory is unacceptable. Although the Poland thesis suggests a European source for Feke's art training and conveniently provides Feke with an occupation that might allow for geographical mobility, a study of Feke's works suggests an alternate, less romantic sequence of events. Feke's apparent fondness for travel implies that either through his or his wife Eleanor's family, the Cozzens of Newport, Feke participated in at least the coastal trade of the Colonial port town. The extant paintings attributed to him testify to this activity. The capacity in which he participated in this trade is also suggested by his paintings. By note of his earliest paintings and the obvious progression of his work

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
depicting the wealthy, established citizenry, Feke was probably a merchant — at least in the earliest phases of his artistic life. Being a merchant, he was aware of and possibly was recognized on his own as an acceptable personage. As a merchant of even minor economic importance, he was accepted into the more select groups of society.

The social status of John Singleton Copley was never in doubt. He possessed entry and acceptance among Boston's elite. The cornerstone of his social position was his unquestioned genius; it was recognized and frequently utilized.

The first fifteen years of his career, from 1753 to 1769, brought substantial financial gain, esteem to his profession, and entrance to the highest circles in Boston. In part, Colonial economic prosperity can account for the number of Copley's subjects. This prosperity, as Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., suggested, defused existing political and economic discontent. Copley was sensitive and alert to the political polarization among his subjects regarding matters of government and trade. As determined by a previous study, Copley's subjects were almost even divided between Tory and Revolutionary.


A letter to Copley from John Greenwood, the artist turned art dealer, offered a certain insight into Copley's social status.

. . . Since I left the West Indies I've been visiting most of the Courts of Europe, and admiring the Thousand fine paintings that one finds distributed among them, tho' at present England bids fair to become the seat of the Arts and Artists. Almost every thing that is not immovable is brot here, from every country, as none pay so generously for real good pictures as the English -- tho' I must confess, I think it begins somewhat to fall off. You'll be surprized when I tell you that I have brot into London above 1500 pictures, and have had the pleasure of adorning some of the first Cabinets in England, so that I have had but little time to exercise my pencil. . . .13

The purpose of Greenwood's letter was to request that Copley paint a portrait of his mother, Mary Charnock Greenwood of Marblehead.14 Greenwood was a native of Boston, born in 1727, and a painter of some repute. In 1760 he painted a portrait of Jonathan Edwards.15 Ten years later, he abandoned the life of a portrait painter and travelled extensively, as his Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam, 1747-48, revealed. Apparently, Greenwood sought another career.

Copley did not. Nor did he wish to parlay his art for an associated career of art collector, art teacher, or -- as with Smibert -- art impresario. Copley maintained portrait painting as the central focus of his life, regardless of his change of address or increased income.16

13 Copley Pelham Letters, John Greenwood to Copley, March 23, 1770, p. 82.
14 Ibid.
15 McLanathan, Art in America, p. 64.
16 Copley submitted an architectural plan for Brattle Square Church in 1772. Although the plan was "admired for its elegance and grandeur," the design of Thomas Dawes was adopted. See Frederic C. Detwiller, "Thomas Dawes's Church in Brattle Square," Old Time New England: The
Early in his career, Copley stated,

... the design I have always had in view, (was) improving in that charming Art which is my delight, and gaining a reputation rather than a fortune...17

While Copley financially prospered and gained social acceptance in the Colonies, he never received the praise bestowed upon West.18

Greenwood's letter related information of the London art world and particularly about the acclaim heaped upon Benjamin West.

West goes on painting like a Raphael and really out does everything one could have expected. His Compositions are Noble, his design correct, and his Colouring harmonious and pleasing, and a certain Sweetness in his Characters, than must please everyone that beholds them.19

Greenwood's analysis of West's accomplishments, however, impressed Copley with the crux of a dilemma: the highest Colonial success in money and social status would not earn him a comparison to "a Raphael."

Copley learned all he could from his Colonial predecessors, and because he learned well, he prospered. Yet he recognized the financial limitations of the Colonies and the artistic limitations of portraiture. His Colonial success paled in comparison with the recognition achieved by the European masters. Further, he was caught between his talents and

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17 Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to (Thomas Ainslie), Boston, Feb. 25, 1765, pp. 32-33.

18 For an idea of Copley's social access, see Jules Prown, John Singleton Copley, Vol. 1, pp. 97-137 for a statistical analysis of 240 portraits painted between 1753 and 1774. Also see Martha Babcock Amory, The Domestic and Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1882).

19 Copley-Pelham Letters, Greenwood to Copley, March 23, 1770, p. 82.
his doubts; apparent realism was ready for a greater test. Could his style and abilities transcend the Colonial limits? One suggestion for came from nearby, urging a break from the domestic confines.

It is with Difficulty my dear friend that a man can get away from the Country where he receiv'd his birth and Education; but when has once broke the spell, and goes out into the World he sees things that he could never see in the Father's Chimney Corner. . .

Only by escaping his Colonial successes could Copley demonstrate that he was a great artist. Benjamin West, who was compared with Raphael, recognized Copley's uniqueness. In writing to a father desiring art instruction for his son, Benjamin West commented upon Copley's intuitive development:

Raphael and several other great painters of those times painted many fine pictures (which are now to be seen) before they had obtained the age of fifteen; so it appears evident to me, the great object they had in view was to surmount early in life, the mechanical difficulties of painting, that is the handling of pencil and the management of colours, that their hands might keep pace with their ideas, so as to receive pleasure from their performances. This convinces me that young artists should receive great pleasure from what they do, as it is that alone can compensate for the great fatigue which must arise from the prodigious length of time necessary to make a painter, let him ever so great a share of genius. . . . You have a strong instance on your side of the water (in Mr. Copley) to what a length a man may carry the art by his own assiduity. . . . If it is not convenient for your son to come to England, let him advance himself as Mr. Copley has done, and he will find himself equal to the first in Europe.

Undoubtedly, Copley would have appreciated these words, if only in part agreeing with them.

Copley's intuitive ability and his financial success contributed

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20 Copley-Pelham Letters, Peter (Pelham?) to Copley, Apr. 28, 1766, p. 98.

21 Copley-Pelham Letters, Benjamin West to Shrimpton Hutchinson, London, June 18, 1771, pp. 118-119.
to his social acceptance. As an artist, he possessed remarkable social mobility. His career was the fulfillment of the limner's dream: a steady, princely income and social prominence. As was typical of him, Copley sought more from his art and from his audience. His Colonial successes could not quiet the educational gaps and artistic limitations affecting his professional advancement.

Copley was unmoved by the social status he gained as a result of his art. What remained unchanged was his concern for education and artistic improvement, conditions which could not be resolved by his Colonial successes.

Copley's determination to fully acquaint himself with the masters of art allowed a degree of obliviousness to the conditions of social advancement. Only education could bridge his vision of Colonial artisan-ship to that of European artistry. Social status was thus insignificant in Copley's values, in that education and not the acceptance of Colonial society would bring him the recognition he hoped for.

Copley's Colonial life was then somewhat of a paradox. He worked with incredible diligence to raise himself and his family from the humbleness of Long Wharf, and did so purely through his artistic ardor. While Colonial payment to him in terms of the number of his subjects remarkably increased, Copley's artistic ambitions were not squarely addressed. The pattern of education and European recognition which he longed for were beyond the discernment of Boston's merchants and clergy and politicians to rectify. Foreshadowing a lack of any commitment to his Colonial existence, Copley was simply other-directed. His feeling for artistic progress was the truly motivating force of his life. Although he strove for material security and social acceptance
in the Colonies, those advancements did not alter his inner vision as an artist who had yet to achieve his paramount goals.
CHAPTER 4

INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS:
COPLEY AND APPARENT REALISM

The Colonial American artistic experience has been thought of as merely an offshoot of British art. Historians and the public have believed painters relied on British manuals, copies of original works, or British training. Colonial artists have been depicted as indebted

1 Colonial artists have been woefully neglected by historians. See James Thomas Flexner, First Flowers of Our Wilderness (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947), pp. 277-278. "A whole bibliographical work could be written on the neglect of American painting by social historians. . . . Samuel Eliot Morison studies 'the intellectual life of New England in the seventeenth century' in his profound and highly original The Puritan Pronoas (New York, 1936). He included chapters on religion, higher education, schools, verse, and 'scientific strivings'. Neither painting nor the highly significant New England tradition of gravestone carving were mentioned. Merle Curtis' Pulitzer prize winning The Growth of American Thought (New York, 1943) is another landmark in the study of our cultural history. Yet, it summarizes Colonial painting in seventy words. . . . Among the most amazing summaries is Charles and Mary Beard's epoch-making The Rise of American Civilization (New York, 1927). The two paragraphs contain nine major errors of fact, the most startling being the statement that West was famous for his portraits and that Copley had enjoyed a period of European study before his Boston period (I, pp. 165-166)." A more recent synthesis by Howard Mumford Jones, O Strange New World, American Culture: The Formative Years (New York: Viking Press, 1964) discusses John Singleton Copley in a single sentence: "John Singleton Copley fled from Massachusetts in 1774 when his life had been threatened by a mob in search of a concealed Tory." Jones is not only brief but, I believe, historically incorrect.

to the mother country's techniques and styles, while the Colonial propensity for artistic realism was an outgrowth of the British example. Further, the Colonial artist was viewed as an imitator or student of this tradition, creating second- or third-rate works. My purpose is to challenge two assumptions evolving from this view.

First, the emphasis of British art as the educational source for Colonial artists is misplaced. Colonial painters did not receive formal training in their art, and especially instructions from British portrait painters. Colonial artists relied upon more indigenous sources of instruction. We must, therefore, re-evaluate the uniqueness of Colonial artists, and to do this, we must analyze how Colonial painters utilized art fundamentals. Their handling of line, shape, color and two-dimensional space suggests an indigenous solution to artistic problems. Colonial painters learned from one another far more than from British sources.

The epitome of Colonial art was evidenced in the work of John Singleton Copley. His portraiture was the fulfillment of this Colonial legacy, and owes little to British models. Instead, Copley's works resulted from his mastery of Colonial art fundamentals.

Based upon his Colonial models, Copley reinterpreted realism. His realism transcended mere likeness. He romantically alluded to his

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3 Horace Walpole, Anecdotes of Painting in England; with Some Account of the Principal Artists; and Incidental Notes on Other Arts. Also, A Catalogue of Engravers Who Have Been Born or Resided in England. Collected by the late George Vertue; Digested and Published from his Original Manuscript, with additions by the Rev. James Dallaway. Additional notes by Ralph N. Wornum, 3 vols. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1849). In the 1762 preface of his first volume, Walpole lamented a lack of achievement in British art. He noted, "Painting had hitherto made but faint efforts in England."
subjects' social status, personalities and psyches.

What fascinated Copley was the expressive emotions of his subjects. Nuances of their unique presence and humanity emerged in his canvases. Copley paid heed to existing artistic conventions: his work evoked the reality of eighteenth century art. Yet, Copley's realism was a subordinate characteristic of his art. Behind his realism lay his purpose: an exploration of character analysis using the tools of eighteenth century American painting. This fusion of indigenous art techniques with his genius for expressive character portrayal is what I call Apparent Realism. In fact, Copley captured more than a mere likeness; he portrayed the essence of each of his subjects. The following analysis illustrates Copley's use of apparent realism.

The use of line in Colonial painting accentuated each figure or object within the picture plane, balanced the picture plane through distinct zones of action and/or repose, allowed for subtly distinguishing dimension, and acted as a shadowing technique. John Smibert's *The Bermuda Group*, exhibited sharp lines that divided the figures on the canvas and established a pronounced vertical direction within the composition. Smibert's weakness resulted from this repetitious use of vertical direction. Such technique was inadequate in distinguishing congested areas of the canvas. In contrast, Feke's full-length, life-sized portrait of *Brigadier General Samuel Waldo* (c. 1748) employed vertical lines and avoided congestion by imaginatively utilizing shadows and visual distortion. Feke accomplished this by ranging the thickness and color value of his lines.

In 1765 Copley painted the portrait of his half-brother, Henry Pelham. In *Boy with Squirrel* (Plate 1), Pelham is seen at about fifteen
years old, gazing ahead in a side pose. Holding a delicate chain, Pelham's hand reflects a light source within the painting. A small chained squirrel sits atop a table contentedly eating.  

That same year Copley entrusted the portrait to Captain R.G. Bruce, who delivered the work at the Royal Academy in London, in spite of Copley's "apprehension of its not being so much esteemed as I could wish."^5 Revealingly, criticism of the painting helps analyze Copley's use of line.

It was the "liney" quality of Copley's *Boy with Squirrel* that Benjamin West mentioned to the Colonial painter as technically incorrect.

"To Mr. William Copley Painter at Boston."

... at first sight the picture struck the Eye as being to liney, which was judged to have arose from there being so much neetness in the lines, which indeed as fare as I was capable of judgeing was somewhat the case.

West offered the following advice as well as suggesting an assignment to Copley:

... for I very well know from endeavouuring at great Correctness in ones out line it is apt to Produce a Poverty in the look of ones work when ever great Desition (decision) is attended to they lines are apt to be fine and edgey. This is a thing in works of great Painter(s). I have remark(ed) has been strictly a voyed, and have given Correctness in a breadth of our line, which is finishing out into the Canves by no determind line when Closely examined. ... As we have every April an Exhibition where our works is exhibited to the Publick, I advise you to Paint a Picture of a half figure or two in one Piece,

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^5 *Copley-Pelham Letters*, Copley to R.G. Bruce, Boston, Sept. 10, 1765, p. 35.
Yet when Copley submitted his second painting at the exhibition of the Society of Artists, it was less enthusiastically received. The portrait of Mary Warner was not criticized for being "liney" but for "...Each Part of the Picture being Equell in Strength of Coulering. ..." Copley attributed this criticism to the lowly status of art in the Colonies. "The people generally regard it no more than any other useful trade, as they sometimes term it, like that of a carpenter, tailor or shew maker, not as one of the most noble Arts in the World." Criticism by the Royal Academy's President, Sir Joshua Reynolds, echoed the disadvantages theme:

... that in any Collection of Painting it will pass for an excellent picture, but considering the Disadvantages... you had laboured under, that it was a very wonderfull Performance. 'That he did not know one Painter at home, who had all the Advantages that Europe could give them, that could equal it, and that if you are capable of producing such a Piece by the mere Efforts of your own Genius, with the advantages of the Example and Instruction which you could have in Europe, You would be a valuable Acquistion to the Art, and one of the first Painters in the World. ...

This multipurpose use of line was a characteristic of Colonial American art and distinguished his portraiture. The portrait of Paul Revere

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6 Copley–Pelham Letters, Benjamin West to Copley, August 4, 1766, pp. 43-44.

7 Copley–Pelham Letters, Benjamin West to Copley, June 20, 1767, pp. 56-58.

8 Copley–Pelham Letters, Copley to (West or Captain R.G. Bruce), Boston, 1767?, pp. 65-66.

9 Ibid., Copley to R.G. Bruce, August 4, 1766, pp. 41-42.
(c. 1765-70) (Plate 2) exhibits diversity of line within three sectors of the painting as it illustrates Copley's talent.

Revere's head may be considered one of three sectors of the composition. The facial features of Revere's portrait are sharply drawn, communicating a sculpturesque or classical quality to the face. Revere's eyes, nose, and lips are captured not as in a photograph, but as in relief sculpture. The hairline and the hair itself are suggestively drawn, as are the wrinkles of the nose, upper lip, and area around the mouth. Copley's sense of facial anatomy tended to be imprecise and rather plastic; and yet Revere's face exudes a "richness of substance, a sculptural quality, and an architectonic sense" whose source is his draftsmanship. 10

Revere's chest and hand under his chin comprise the second sector of the painting (Plate 3). Here, Copley's use of line delineates clothing textures. The white billowy shirt, apparently unbuttoned at the collar, creases and folds in a full yet loosely fitted way. Copley magnificently captures the shirt and waistcoat. Revere's broad wrist and firm fingers, although anatomically suspect, nonetheless evoke an impression of Revere's physical toughness and Copley's artistic finesse. The blunt, somewhat heavy facial lines allude to the strength of Revere's upper body, in spite of its being delicately clothed. In this portrayal of strength through labor, Copley's Paul Revere exhibits early characteristics of egalitarian art.

The third sector of the portrait serves as a recapitulation of the linearity of the entire work (Plate 4). On a lustrously polished table rest engraving tools. Revere's hand surrounds a small silver

teapot. Lines varying in thickness and color denote the thickness of the table while the table top itself may be conceived of as a line. Revere's shirt is reflected on the table. Through the interaction of line in this sector, Copley creates a sense of perspective and dimension. He raises the "primitive virtues" of Colonial art, especially its linearity, "to a higher level by his genius."  

Throughout his European travels Copley incessantly commented on painting to Henry Pelham. In a letter from Paris dated September 2, 1774, he instructed Pelham on the importance of drawing:

practice continually. Draw landscapes, Dogs, Cats, Cows, horses, in short, I would have you keep in your Pocket a book and Porto Crayon -- as I no do -- and where ever you see a butifull form Sketch it in your Book. By this you will habituate your Self to fine formes. I have got through the Difficultys of the Art, I trust, and shall reap a continual Source of pleasure from my past Industry as long as it pleases God to give me health and life, but yet I lament I had not saved more of my time than I have done. you have it now before you and if you are determined you will accomplish it. Study those Works of Raphael which you can procure, the Cartoons in particular. Draw then not in a finishe manner, but to habituate yourself to the manner of combineing your figures.

In the same letter Copley analyzes the works by Poussin seen at the Palais Royal.

The out lines of his figure are not blended with the ground, but Sharp and determined, his expression is charming. his Men, Woaman, and Children, laugh, Cry, Grieve, and indeed express all the passion of the Soul surprisingly well. I would have you draw some of his heads, that you may lern of what forms and Lines they are composed.

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11 Ibid., p. 9

12 Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Henry Pelham, Boston, Sept. 2, 1774, pp. 244-245.

13 Ibid., p. 246.
Copley's observations about continual drawing were a reaffirmation of his past practices. Ceaselessly, he reworked his portraits as he would his later historical paintings. The uplifted right eyebrow of Paul Revere induces us to ponder Revere's mood or thoughts (Plate 5). Copley's draftsmanship accounts for this effect. His advice to Pelham was founded upon experience that European observations corroborated.

While line provides the edge between elements of a painting, shape primarily differentiates objects or figures within a painting. In eighteenth century Colonial American painting, shape reiterated the one-dimensional picture plane. Further, it accounted for a way of balancing a painting. In John Greenwood's Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam, the artist arranged over twenty figures, drinking, jousting, and reveling within a large hall. Yet Greenwood's use of space consisted of a single plane. His figures were alike in dress and activity, and were vertically posed on the canvas. Robert Peke's sense of space was sophisticated and realistic, as in his portrait of General Waldo. Waldo's limbs convey the weight and feel of flesh; shapes of nature (clouds, trees, stone) are convincing; and visual stimulation is enhanced through vertical and horizontal interplay of shapes.

Copley's use of shape in Paul Revere (Plate 3) was most evident through Revere's anatomy. Revere's hands, especially the one holding the teapot, are distinguished by muscles, joints, and sense of fleshiness. Copley's artistry with shapes reflects a fascination with anatomy that characterized his work. Early in his career, he compiled his own drawings into an anatomy-sketch book to which he often referred.

"He studied available anatomy books to familiarize himself with the terminology and to learn the functions of the muscles."  

Copley's use of shape conveyed a fullness of form or a heightened realism. For example, Revere's thumb indents the right side of his face, which accentuates its fleshiness (Plate 5). This treatment of shape strikes one as immediate and rather candid, prompting the viewer to search for other suggestions of realism. In a somewhat philosophical digression, Copley wrote to Henry Pelham:

... what remains to be done is to give Carracter to the figures that compose the Picture. this consists chiefly in making that variety which we find in life; and making the heads to think agreeable to the subject that is before them and ingages their attention and agreeable to their attitudes. this part is Ideal, tho the variety is not. I will not contend with those that say a man may paint from his Ideas only, for I will admit it; I will admit that all men do; only I will observe that the memory of all men is not equilently retentive. One man shall see an object and twelve months after shall have as perfect a knowledge of it as another that has seen the same object only a few Days; but yet the man who would see an object with an intention to paint it in a few Days still paints as much from Idea as the one who retains a remembrance of what we have seen. so that when the Artist has a model in his Appartment and Views it, then turns to his picture and markes whatever he wishes to express on his Picture, what is it but remembrance of what he has seen?

Copley sought to heighten the process of remembering through the fullness of his forms.

... I will allow the man whose memory is such as to retain what he has seen a year or two before as perfectly as I can one or two Seconds, is on a footing with me when he paints not having the life before him. But this I believe no man can do, hence we see all Ideal performances of but little merrit, and those who have made the great figure in the Arts are those that have shewn more jeloussy of the goodness of their memory and refreshed it by having the life by them by which they secured to themselves

15 Ibid.
that truth of Imitation (and variety which in Nature is Infinite) that their works appear a kind of Second nature that delights the Spectator. 16

Copley's shapes alluded to reality. Recording Revere's face demanded more than a rendering of details. Copley's sensuous facial shapes convince the viewer he actually witnesses Revere's pensive expression; the manipulation of space captures a moment of spontaneity. Again, Copley's anatomy—hands, nose, mouth, forehead and cheek area were not exact in an anatomical sense. But they do possess "the truth of Imitation" due to the fullness of his shapes.

The Colonial use of color emphasized the flat, two-dimensional surface, thus accentuating elements of line and space. Color individualized

16Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Henry Pelham, Rome, March 14, 1775, pp. 294-308. Copley's portrayal of character was unusual in light of contemporary British concerns. British exclusivity in portrait painting accounted, to a great degree, for Colonial America's emphasis on this art form. Thomas Gainsborough's portraits were characterized by the sophistication and grace of his subjects. Gainsborough concentrated his attention on communicating a social ease and elegance. Through a masterful handling of drapery, clothing, and other textural materials a picture of refined people and life style was indicated. Different techniques were practiced by Gainsborough's rival, Sir Joshua Reynolds. Reynolds preferred a more demonstrative emphasis. That is, through historical drama, allegorical references, or allusions to activity, Reynolds's subjects often displayed "ennobled qualities." See H. W. Jansen, History of Art: A Survey of the Major Visual Arts from the Dawn of History to the Present Day, 16th edition (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971), pp. 451-452. A consistent theme of 18th Century British commentary on art revolved around art's usefulness. In this light, portraiture was seen as practical, while, for example, landscape painting was construed as mere amusement. See Daniel Webb, An Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting: and into the Merits of the Most Celebrated Painters, Ancient and Modern, in Aesthetische Schritten: Nachdruck der Ausgaben von 1761, 1762, und 1769 mit einer einleitenden, Abhandlung von Ingrid Kerhoff. (Munich: Wilhelm Pünk Verlay, 1974). See Webb's third dialogue entitled "The Antiquity and Usefulness of Painting" See also George Turnbull's A Treatise on Ancient Painting (London: A. Miller, 1740), p.v.; Turnbull's dedication of his work to the Right Honorable Henry Lord Viscount Lonsdale refutes the notion that art is for amusement but rather for education, "A Subject, my Lord, of the Highest Importance. . ."
Feke's portrait of General Waldo. Less muted than the coloration of Smibert, Feke's coloring techniques created the feeling of textural garments, fleshy skin tones, and atmospheric reality. Feke's color selection and techniques, as in the Waldo portrait, exhibit color relationships based upon primary colors, particularly variations of red.

Copley reinforced the illusion of reality through individualized colors. The affinitive pastel shades in Boy with Squirrel were meant to be eye-catching and bold. Pelham's clothes are painted to appear as honestly as the boy's far-off gaze and his facial skin tones are intimated through subtle coloration befitting its delicacy.

In his portrait of Paul Revere, Copley relies on shadings of white and black because simple colors suited Revere's simple attire. Copley's masterful handling of color created what an art historian describes as the "mobile mouth, the straight nose, and the broad forehead" of the virtuous artisan (Plate 2). Copley's treatment of gray, white, and black colors that characterize the Revere painting exhibits an extraordinary technical competence.

Copley's utilization of line, color, shape, and the flat two-dimensional surface was orchestrated towards recreating the appearance of reality. Indigenous Colonial painters provided the models from which Copley learned; their works were his sources. He transcended his predecessors in ability and in purpose for Copley explored his subjects'
identities, attempting to portray their character. This combination of virtuoso technical ability and skill in character penetration appealed to the realistic expectations of his subjects. Copley's "apparent" realism satisfied his subjects while it allowed him the vehicle for educational experimentation. Copley's realism was more than technique; it represented Copley's educational development within the context of Colonial America. Examining the elements of his art, and the full potential he sought to make of them, reveals his method. What is masterful of his art is that we feel the sensitivity of his portraits as we contemplate his method.

Copley's portraits arose from a verifiable Colonial art tradition which was evidenced by his mastery of these art fundamentals. Yet, as I have stated, his artistic developed was rooted in his Colonial environment. Whatever artistic success Copley enjoyed emanated from his early educational experiences. The likelihood of an encouraging and extraordinarily supportive family and home life proved essential to his artistic maturation. In addition, his artistic education was advanced by at least some public education. Most emphatically he enjoyed Pelham's private instruction. An educational atmosphere existed in Boston which nurtured the artist.

Early Colonial artists and public and private schoolmasters created educational traditions which need to be recognized. Aside from Copley's inner motivation for artistic advancement, recognition of Copley's educational opportunities makes his success understandable. His Colonial years must be appreciated as the historical wellspring for Copley's greatness.

The historian examining indigenous traditions shaping Copley's education must look to the influence of his family and his teachers,
his self-educative efforts, and the artistic freedom within Boston. In a sense, the isolation of Colonial life afforded Copley time for experimentation and reflection. Colonial Boston provided a unique set of circumstances which, remarkably, served Copley well.
CHAPTER 5

BOY WITH SQUIRREL:
A CLUE IN THE COLEY-PELHAM RELATIONSHIP

More so than any of his Colonial predecessors, Copley was "overwhelmed with orders" as early as 1765. The vast majority of the 350 portraits attributed to Copley from 1753 to 1774 were of prosperous yet not especially significant individuals. Art historians, such as August Thorndike Perkins, in his A Sketch of the Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley (1873), and the most recent work of Jules Prown, John Singleton Copley (1966), have included information on Copley's subjects' residence, occupation, education, church affiliation, politics, marital status, and other data. Copley's successful practice was reflected in the favorable comments his work elicited from his subjects. In the early years of Copley's self-employment, sometime between 1755 and 1757, he painted the portrait of Thomas Ainslie, the Collector of the Port of Quebec.

I am fav'rd with Yours, and the picture came very safe and gives me Satisfaction. I am just going to send it to Scotland to please a fond Parent, and as it goes in a Man of War, I hope she will receive it Safe. I believe you may find it worth your while to take a trip down here in the Spring, there are several people who would be glad to employ you. . . .2


77.
That a wealthy merchant, professional man, politician or clergyman would desire his portrait or family immortalized on canvas was in keeping with genteel British tradition. Colonial art portrayed the fashion, elegance, and dignity of Colonial peoples. Previous to Copley, a number of Colonial painters met these needs. Robert Feke's Royall Family, 1741, was an example of this (Plate 6). Royall was the wealthiest man in the American Colonies. His fortune accrued from the family's profitable Antiqua slave and molasses trade. Feke painted the family portrait as a testament to the financial success, civility, and repose of the merchant. Feke understood and communicated "elegance without pomposity, formality without Colonial awkwardness." This mysterious Newport painter-sailor portrayed an inordinate number of families of wealth and social prominence.

Besides the work of Feke, Joseph Blackburn's paintings of silks, satins, and textural quality inspired Copley. Indeed, the portrait of Mrs. Sylvester Gardiner, 1760, once attributed to Copley, exhibits Blackburn's "handling of the drapery, the softer value contrasts and gentle brushwork and the palette as well as the diagonal alternation of lights and darks. . . ."[^1]


Copley's portraits affirmed the social and economic status of his subjects. Art historian George M. Cohen suggests that the immediate historical significance of Copley's subjects, besides their wealth or social status, was their depiction "in a pictorial setting from their daily lives." The portrait d'apparant captured Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin (1773) (Plate 7) at home and Paul Revere with his silversmith tools. The inclusion of familiar objects or settings infused a decidedly American tone in Copley's paintings. In Rome during February and March of 1775, Copley painted Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Izard (Plate 8). Copley stated "Mr. Izard('s) portrait will be a very fine one" as it indeed is. Yet, by comparison, this 1775 work differs from the portrait.

6 In Kenneth Silverman's A Cultural History of the American Revolution (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1976), the author writes: "He continued to work in his style of unapologetic realism, depicting Puritanism grown prosperous, couched on velvet but staring out with the old crabbed intensity" (p. 90). Equally rhetorical in commenting upon Copley's technique is James Flexner's American Painting: First Flowers of Our Wilderness: "Copying from life features, pose perspective background was drawn irresistibly toward illusionistic realism. This pleased his public. It was regarded as proof of greatness that when one of his portraits was sent to Scotland, the subject's infant son, having "eyed your picture... sprung to it, roared and screeched, and attempted gripping the hand, but when he could not catch hold of it... he stamped and scolded" (p. 276).


8 In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the simplicity and realism of American painting would be connected to nationalistic sentiments of the new republic. See Linda B. Sumter, "High Style in Eighteenth Century New England and London," American Art Review, July, 1977, pp. 53-70. Contemporary reaction to the Mifflin portrait was most favorable and particularly a significant addition for Philadelphia. Benjamin West Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Archives of American Art, S. Elliot to S. Burnell, Philadelphia, August 24, 1773.

9 Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Henry Pelham, March 14, 1775,
d'apparant technique distinguishing the Miflin portrait. The ornate table, classical vase, and Roman sculptures in the background differentiate the Izard painting from Copley's earlier American works.

Copley portrayed his subjects in an identifying time frame that was relevant to their identities. He believed in the historicity of all his work, and the need for truthfully representing this fact. Copley's scenarios include glossy table tops, simply attired people, and contemplative gestures. These elements of his art transcended ornamentation; they depict a decidedly Colonial ambience. His portrait of his half-brother, Henry Pelham, evinces the portrait d'apparant. Pelham's portrait remains one of Copley's most sensitive character portrayals. Through an investigation of the elements of this work, however, more than a Colonial ambience is revealed.

I believe that the Pelham portrait reveals an important link in the Copley-Pelham relationship. The painting serves as an historical document highlighting Copley's concern and love for his half-brother.

Why is young Henry Pelham's portrait historically significant (Plate 7)? Most immediately, it is a beautiful picture and an artifact of the eighteenth century. Further, everything from the simple table to Pelham's plain dress exudes a Colonial atmosphere. Significantly, an analysis of the painting reveals a remarkable clue alluding to the intensity and tenderness of the Copley-Pelham relationship. The painting reveals a physical deformity of Henry Pelham's left ear. Rolled

Rome, pp. 294-308. Unlike the Miflin portrait and his work done in America, the Izard painting "is filled with archeological bric-a-brac that distracts the eye from the sitters... Details of costume and accessories detracted from any personal attempt at psychological penetration of the sitters' character," George M. Cohen, A History of American Art, p. 23.
or overlapping muscle in the upper ear suggests that the ear probably protruded excessively. Pelham appears to have been born with what is called a cup or lop ear,\textsuperscript{10} (Plates 10 and 11) a deformity generally believed to be genetically caused or the result of the fetus's position during pregnancy.\textsuperscript{11}

A sideward profile concealed the protrusion. Indeed, the extraordinary gentleness and attractiveness of the young boy were accentuated by Copley's pose.

An analysis of the Copley-Pelham Letters reveals poor health and a variety of illnesses that afflicted Henry Pelham. In a letter dated November 2, 1774, Pelham learned of Copley's safe arrival in Europe. Having himself undertaken a journey to Philadelphia, Pelham stated:

Alas! I wish I had a more satisfactory account to give then that I have taken this journey in search of lost Health.\textsuperscript{12}

Noting that Pelham was twenty-one or twenty-two years old, consider his description of the following symptoms:

I have been for nearly 10 months past very subject to nervous complaints which showed themselves in an almost continued Dizziness, Headache, Loss of Appetite, Trembling of the Nerves, and Lowness of Spirits.

Pelham stated that he was under the care of Doctor Perkins, who had


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Copley-Pelham Letters, Henry Pelham to Copley, Nov. 2, 1774, p. 266.
ordered the trip to Philadelphia as well as "steel and frequent riding." Six days after Pelham wrote to Copley, he remained in Philadelphia and wrote his uncle, John Singleton, complaining about his "Nervous Disorders." Pelham attributed his failing health to the increasing political turmoil:

I cant but think myself very unfortunate thus to have lost so much of the best part of Life, to have my Bus(i)ness, upon which my happiness greatly depends, so abruptly cut short, all my bright prospects anialated, the little Property I had acquired rendered useless. . . . This I long foresaw would be the case. The expectation of this dist(r)eesing Scene was the cause of that illness which sent me to Philadelph(i)a last fall: When I think of my present Situation, it requires all my philosophy to keep up my spirits under this acumula(te)d Loan of uneasiness.15

13 Copley-Pelham Letters, Henry Pelham to Copley, Nov. 2, 1774, p. 266. As part of Jules Prown's statistical analysis of Copley's American portraits, Prown lists Nathiel Perkins, Sylvester Gardiner, and Joseph Warren as physicians Copley painted. Documents relating to the practices of Perkins and Gardiner, to the best of my knowledge, do not exist. An early biographer of Copley noted Perkins was "A Staunch Loyalist, he left with the British for Halifax in 1776." (Barbara Neville Parker and Anne Wheeler, John Singleton Copley, American Portraits in Oil, Pastel, and Miniature with Biographical Sketches (Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1938), p. 153. The Massachusetts Historical Society possesses the Joseph Warren Ledger, at least a partial account of Warren's patients from 1763 to 1768. An examination of the document has failed to place Pelham as a patient of Warren's in this period. That Warren and Pelham were at least acquaintances emerges from the Copley-Pelham Letters: "I have often passed Doct Warren's Grave. I felt a disagreab(le) Sensation, thus to see a Townsman, and old Acquaintance led by unbounded Ambition to an untimely death. . . . (Pelham to Susanna Copley, Boston, July 23, 1775, pp. 346-47. Warren's journal does note that Copley's father-in-law, Richard Clarke, extensively utilized the services of Doctor Warren from April, 1764 to March, 1766.

14 Ibid.

Pelham's letters occasionally mentioned "Being confined with a cold... for several days" as well as being "affected with a violent ague in my face, which I hope is now going off." Pelham's symptoms included nervousness and dizziness. In view of his deformed outer ear, Pelham probably suffered "an inner ear abnormality indicated by this congenital anomaly of the exterior ear." His complaints in his letters indicated a persistent problem that undoubtedly unnerved him, and is symptomatic of inner or middle ear problems.

Jules Prown uncovered additional data regarding Pelham that substantially sustains the above analysis. After leaving the Colonies in 1776, Pelham visited relatives in England and then Ireland where he performed a variety of jobs. Prown writes: "In 1806 Pelham, who could not swim (Pelham Papers, Pelham to John Cross, March 24, 1792), drowned in the Kenmore River at Bear Island."

Pelham's drowning may be related to his inner ear problem. This inner ear difficulty may explain why Pelham, who grew up on Long Wharf, never learned to swim.

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16 Ibid., Henry Pelham to Copley, Jan. 27, 1776, p. 364.
17 Ibid., Henry Pelham to Charles Pelham, June 5, 1776.
19 Ibid.
21 Flexner maintains that Copley was terrified of the sea and his fear contributed to procrastination regarding European travel. Flexner illustrates this alleged phobia through Copley's paintings that contain the sea and especially Watson and the Shark. See James Thomas Flexner,
Copley maintained an abiding concern for his brother's career and well being. Pelham's ear in the portrait provides a clue, heretofore not considered, regarding a possible rationale for their special relationship. Pelham's burdensome health may be linked with Copley's portrayal of him. Copley exerted tremendous concern for his brother's health, career, happiness, and safety. Undoubtedly, Copley was sensitive to his younger brother's medical problems.

Sir Joshua Reynolds' comments regarding Boy with Squirrel help reveal Copley's technique and the painting's appeal. R. G. Bruce related Reynolds' remarks:

he observed a little hardness in the Drawing, Coldness in the Shades, an over minuteness. . . .22

The emphasis of Reynolds' criticism was quite different from the "excessively liney" observations of West.23 Reynolds' objections suggested Copley's realism faltered because Copley's portrait was "over painted." Bruce relayed Reynolds' praise:

But still it is a wonderful Picture to be sent by a young man who was never out of New England, and had only some bad Copies to study.24

The remarks concerning the "Coldness in the Shades" was an aspect of Copley's technique that disturbed Reynolds.

As James Flexner romantically surmises, Reynolds realized the

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24 Ibid., Bruce to Copley, p. 42.
work's "awkwardness," yet the painting "struck the sensibilities with
the power of a cannonball." Copley's sharpness of detail, two-
dimensional plane, and choice of color was unconventional for realistic
painting.

The power of *Boy with Squirrel* transcends its concern for reality. The painting captures the frailty of Henry Pelham, the apprentice and
confidant of his older brother. Indeed, *Boy with Squirrel* attests
to Copley's larger sense of responsibility to his "Mother and Broth(er),
whom I am bound by all the ties of Duties and Effec(c)tion not to Desert
as long as I live."

This remarkable portrait is a valuable source contributing to our
understanding of Copley's art and his life. The work explores the identity
and expressiveness of his brother in the context of the Colonial world.
Copley recognized the interrelatedness of character portrayal within
an appropriate time period. Behind the guise of realism, he explored
the emotional force of portraiture. Further, he enlarged what consti-
tuted portraiture through the *portrait d'apparant.* He was educated
by the work of Feke, Smibert and Blackburn in portraying a subject's
social position because that was of prime Colonial concern. Copley's
indigenous education made him retain this idea even in *Boy with Squirrel.*
Henry Pelham's social status is not the identifying element of the por-

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25 James T. Flexner, *John Singleton Copley* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,


27 D.R. Slade, "Henry Pelham, the Half-Brother of John Singleton
Copley," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, V,* Boston,
1898, p. 194. Also, see *Copley-Pelham Letters,* Copley to (West or
trait. Compared to Feke's *Royall Family*, Pelham's picture possesses few signs of wealth or even elegance. Copley used the significantly lower class portrayal of Pelham as a foil in depicting his half-brother as an expressive Colonial figure, just as Feke identified Royall. Simply, Copley expanded the identification of social class. He recognized that honesty in portraying social status was exactly what was needed when enlarging the scope of individualized portraiture. *Boy with Squirrel* is technically limited to Copley's indigenous education as it, additionally, serves to illustrate the inventiveness of the artist. Part of Henry Pelham's charm was that he was of humble origin and status and was still worthy of painting. Copley's depiction of his expressiveness made the portrait truly memorable.

While the painting brought no money, it did bring Copley recognition. It was the unanimous appreciation of his work, the praise bestowed upon it by West and Reynolds, that whetted Copley's desire for European study. More importantly, Copley's quest for fame motivated him to perfect his art. *Boy with Squirrel* epitomizes the characteristics of personality exploration, Colonial ambience, and a mastery of Colonial art fundamentals. It is Copley's supreme educational achievement for it blends what he learned in America with his natural gifts.

Copley's choice of Henry Pelham for this work was not incidental. It suggests the artist's need to express his emotions unconnected to any commission; the painting is a work of love and brotherly concern. As the Copley-Pelham correspondence amply illustrates, Copley confided

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R.G. Bruce?), Boston, p. 64.
in his brother about his art techniques, finances, as well as his artistic aspirations. He educated Pelham on the nuances of painting, articulating his own purposes, Copley's continual self-education. Only with Pelham was Copley confidant enough to reveal his fascination for learning and teaching about his work.

Although Boy with Squirrel had meaning to Copley regarding his self-education and his relationship to Pelham, the painting also indicates Copley's search for criticism. For the artist, the words of West and Reynolds give meaning to what had been an oftentimes lonely endeavor.

With the assistance of Captain Bruce, Copley could present his painting to British art circles. The question of when he might have actually heard their criticism, or seen other contemporary works, or learned first-hand of technique and simply discussed the arts arises. Boy with Squirrel was a seminal work because it suggests Copley and Pelham's bond, because of its positive reception and artistic recognition of Copley's abilities, because it signified a milestone in Copley's career and because it communicated Copley's sense of obligation to his brother and mother. Yet, while Boy with Squirrel would journey to the Continent, its creator would not. For Copley, art education would remain dependent upon what was accessible in the Colonies and the far-off criticism engendered by his work. The pattern of Copley's Colonial existence focused upon his talents, family, and the building of his profession, thus sublimating the young artist's ambitions to acquire an education and with that an income by artistic reputation. The Royal Academy's enthusiastic reception of Boy with Squirrel marked a beginning which signaled that his ambitions might be fulfilled.
CHAPTER 6

SEEKING A LARGER STAGE:

COPLEY AND HISTORY PAINTING

How Peter Pelham would have rejoiced had he been able to read Copley's words:

... if my Business was anyways slack, but it is so far otherwise that I have a large Room full of Pictures unfinished, which would engage me twelve months, if I did not begin any others; this rendered it impossible for me to leave the place I am in. ... I assure You I have been as fully employed these several Years past as I could expect or wish to be. ... 1

Feke, the young Charles Wilson Peale, and most practitioners could not say that they had sufficient work. 2 Their lives were spent, in great part, seeking commissions and performing alternative tasks.

Copley enjoyed an uncommon success. Based in Boston, he ventured to Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1770 and to New York City in 1771, enjoying a degree of financial regularity in his life that eluded most Colonial painters. In Boston, he headed a family, overseeing the career of his half-brother, Henry Pelham. Indeed,

1 Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Thomas Ainslie, Boston, Feb. 25, 1765, pp. 32-33.

although a painter, Copley fitted well into this Colonial world. He worked long hours and labored painstakingly at his art, experiencing "so many hours of severe study." He urged Henry Pelham to work as hard, demanding that young Pelham draw continually to discover the nuances of color, shapes, and textures. Only diligence would raise his family's financial station as well as Copley's and Pelham's artistic calibre.

Copley often expressed concern for the artistic limitations portraits imposed. As historians have noted,

For this society portraiture was the one acceptable art form because it had a practical social application. A portrait could be sent to family far away as a token of the physical presence of a loved one, or it could descend to a family distant in time, providing a kind of material immortality.

At least three factors contributed to the lack of breadth in the Colonial art world. Most immediately, the primacy of portraits monopolized the tastes of British and Colonial patrons. Particularly in the Colonies, British tastes predominated for reasons of tradition and status. Art served as a connecting link between colony and mother country; mutual familiarity of paintings, furniture, and china attested to this bond. Crucially, the more similar the Colonial artifact was to the British standard, the more intact was Anglo-American identity.

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3 Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Peter Pelham, Boston, Sept. 12, 1766, pp. 47-48.


A second factor was that Colonists commissioning works of art made up a small percentage of the population. Furthermore, Prown's analysis of Copley's subjects, including their education, occupation, and family background, suggests a tiny market for any art. That Copley's father owned and bequeathed prints does allude to a somewhat wider art market. Mezzotint productions could satisfy this clientele.

Yet, even if a wider market existed, comprised of individuals of lower social status, the subjects of pictures or prints would not necessarily change. Portraiture, in a sense, symbolized upper-class British culture and artistic superiority. Richard Copley's probate records notwithstanding, portraits and prints were probably reserved for upper-income or higher-status people. Portraiture, not historical pictures, interested them.

In terms of financial improvement and for property, Copley's ambitions echoed the motivation of Colonial life. But as an artist, Copley sought growth. Stubbornly, and perhaps naively, he viewed historical pictures as the apex of an artist's development. He wanted to fulfill what was a nagging hope: that his talents were equal to the standards of great art. Copley was determined to discover this. Colonial people eagerly solicited him for portraiture

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work, yet Copley received no other encouragement, such as sponsorship from wealthy or art-appreciative Bostonians. Such had been the fortunate circumstances of Benjamin West in 1758. The Philadelphia merchant, William Allen, arranged for West's European voyage, contributed money to him, and even employed West in painting copies of the old masters. Allen noted, "it is a pity such a genius should be cramped for want of a little cash." 9

These particular Colonial circumstances -- British tastes, a small art market and the lack of patronage -- constricted Copley's artistic growth. This is why, perhaps, Copley's interest in historical painting was connected to the intellectual isolation of Colonial life as well as to his dreams for travel and education. Through his intense self-study of art theory, art history, philosophy, and architecture, Copley sought to do more with his art. In the eighteenth century, this desire translated itself into painting biblical and classical scenes. History painting was Copley's goal in that it required a first-hand exposure to European museums, works of art, and travel. In short, history painting symbolized Copley's desire for a more comprehensive education. Only by seeing the paintings of the world's masters might he evaluate his own potential for greatness.

Peter Pelham, and John Smibert, as practicing artists in Boston, provided a link for Copley to the European art world. Both men had achieved recognition in England and they, undoubtedly influenced


9 Ibid., p. 29.
Copley. Their paintings were a part of Copley’s education providing him with a barometer of the larger art world.

Many questions are raised by Copley’s ambition for historical painting. What did he mean by historical painting? Where did he learn that historical painting was important for an artist’s fame? And how did historical painting relate to Apparent Realism and his work to date? The questions and their answers help reveal the educational activities and thought processes of the artist, allowing us to understand Copley’s professional aspirations.

Copley believed that America clearly limited the artistic range of an artist, as he stated in his letter to Jean Etienne Liotard. He wrote to Liotard that "the best Swis Crayons" would be in greater demand in America, other than by Copley himself, if America was not "the seat of war and desolation." But American limitations affected more than the materials of art. American limitation affected the scope of art. Group portraits by Feke, Smibert, and Greenwood were the only alternatives to portraiture in the Colonies. Those works were commissioned, and as with Feke’s Isaac Royall Family, highly prized by an artist. But even commissioned group portraits did not abandon the rigidity of design evidenced by the Isaac Royall Family or its predecessor, Smibert’s Bishop Berkeley Group. Since differences in subject matter, design, and artistic challenge were

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11 Ibid.
absent from Colonial culture, painting also conformed to strict limits.

Nevertheless, Copley very clearly sought growth in all of these areas. Between 1754 and 1755 he finished three paintings which were not associated with any commission. These works were Galatea, The Return of Neptune, and Mars, Venus and Vulcan. He probably used prints as his guides in performing these pieces, the kinds of printed materials Smibert was known to possess. The paintings were performed early in Copley's art career, even as early as eight years before he had written to Liotard expressing the artistic limitations encountered by the Colonial artist. What is represented in these three historical works is a search for artistic expression and experimentation derived from religious and mythological themes. As a result, the subject matter allowed for experimentation in picture composition and arrangement, while suggesting appreciation of the intellectual background of each work.

Copley believed that as an artist he needed to expand beyond portraiture in emulation of classical themes, religious pieces, and works associated with great European painters. Yet, it appears Copley rejected eighteenth century art theory. As advanced by the art theoreticien, Johan Winckelman, and the artist, Anton Mengs, neo-classicism depicted "ideal, universal types rather than individual human beings." Neo-classicism sought to teach moral truths and,

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12 Prown, Copley, Vol. 1, p. 16.

13 Alberts, Benjamin West, pp. 41-45.
as Neil Harris has suggested, "make virtue attractive and vice repellant." Given Copley's self-educative efforts and intellectual astuteness, Copley rejected neo-classicalism as undoubtedly foreign to his immediate artistic concerns. For Copley, portraiture and eventual historical works required efforts involving individualization. The entire focus of neo-classicism probably ran contrary to his artistic inclinations.

Copley's correspondence and other primary materials do not connect him with a neo-classical movement. Rather, the challenge and artistic experimentation of performing art works within traditions of art history intrigued Copley. As a young artist and as a successful portraitist, Copley was stimulated by the legacy of art history. In his historical painting, in particular, he demonstrated the need to better educate himself in the technical aspects of his art. At the same time, his historical painting manifested the educational limitations he suffered because of not possessing direct exposure to the works of the masters. His words, "this frozen region," were not a slap at the cold winter beauty of

14 Neil Harris, The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790-1860 (New York: George Braziller, 1966), p. 11. Harris's analysis of neo-classicalism is based upon Sir Joshua Reynolds' Fifteen Discourses Delivered in the Royal Academy (London, 1906, 1928) in which Reynolds rejects portraiture for history painting. Quoting from Reynolds' Fourth Discourse, page 59, Harris writes: "'Present time and future may be considered as rivals,' Reynolds declared, and 'he who solicits the one must expect to be discountenanced by the other,'" p. 12. Copley's familiarity with Reynolds' lectures probably was initiated with Copley's emigration in 1774. Writing from London, Copley counselled Pelham: "I would send you Sir Joshua Reynolds Lectures if I was sure you had not them; but if you have not they are well worth your possessing. I think them the best things of their kind that has been wrote." Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Henry Pelham, London, Aug. 17, 1774, p. 241.
New England or the Colonial world, but frustration of his thwarted ambitions. The challenge of painting historical works was an aspiration which only intensified as he became more prosperous in the art of portraiture. Copley lamented this irony. When he would be encouraged to paint historical pictures, Copley believed his formal education would truly begin. In the meantime, it would suffice to practice his profession and educate himself by reading art histories, architectural studies, and letters on painting. Probably belonging to Pelham or Smibert, those studies included Count Francesco Algarotti, *Letters upon Painting*; Roger dePiles' *Abrege de la Vie des Paintings* or his *The Principles of Painting*; Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England*; Daniel Webb, *An Inquiry in the Beauties of Painting*; George Turnbull, *A Treatise on Ancient Painting*, and James Gibbs, *A Book of Architecture*. Together, these works provided Copley a historical overview of his profession. It must have been comforting for him to read about the recognition and importance of artists to the cultures of Rome, Greece and Italy. And, it must have been inspirational to read about the lives of the world's master artists. These artistic studies provided Copley with information about art history and the meaning of art as well as serving as his library.

*James Gibbs, A Book of Architecture, Containing Designs of Buildings and Ornaments*, served Copley as Gibbs hoped the book would:

for Designs can be procured. Such may be here furnished with Draughts of useful and convenient Buildings and proper Ornaments.\textsuperscript{16}

At least in two instances, Copley probably recalled the general plans contained in Gibbs' collection. In the refurbishing of his home, Mount Pleasant, Copley took a great interest in the lay-out of the structure, including the positioning of doors, windows, closets, and overall room plans.\textsuperscript{17} With this structure and his proposed plan for Brattle Street Church of 1772, we may assume an affinity between Copley's interest in building design and his familiarity with Gibbs' book. At any rate, Copley possessed an adaptive mind. He integrated what he read and observed in building design and in his painting. While he was far from a master designer, Copley had a strong sense of the order of a house and how rooms needed to be made agreeable to the work going on within them.

\begin{quote}
I have been all a long Ancious about the roomlyness of the Passages and am so how about the hight of that which leads to my great Room (painting room). I hope you will take care of it, as you may ruin the House by a mistake in that.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Copley's education emphasized this integrating of information. His familiarity with Gibbs' book should be assumed to be a part of what Copley drew from when formulating ideas relating to Mount Pleasant's design.

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\textsuperscript{17}Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Henry Pelham, New York, July 14, July 24, August 3, August 17, September 9, November 6, 1771, pp. 127-130, 132-134, 136-138, 141-143, 151-154, 159-161, 173-175.
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\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., Copley to Henry Pelham, New York, Sept. 20, 1771, p. 160.
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Daniel Webb's, *An Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting and into the Merits of the Most Celebrated Painters, Ancient and Modern* has many of the qualities of inspirational literature. It exulted the times of artists such as Leonardo and Raphael. Webb used literature, especially the writings of Aristotle and Plutarch, in illustrating the meaning of art. In the seven dialogues which make up the work, Webb's Dialogue III, "The Antiquity and Usefulness of Painting," sought to prove the societal benefits of painting.

What emerges most impressionably from Webb's history was the romance associated with art. "Painting may be styled the eloquence of colors," Webb offered. The role of the artist was to capture the ennobling lessons of life. Not surprisingly, history painting exhibited the most significant expression worthy of composition. Webb's enthusiasm for art captivated Copley and stimulated his quest for artistic and educational progress. Similarly, Webb's reverence

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20 Ibid., Dialogue VII, "Of Composition." Webb analyzed: "History painting is the representation of a momentary drama: We may therefore, in treating of composition, borrow our ideas from the stage; and divide it into two parts, the scenery and the drama," p. 136. When in Rome in March, 1775, Copley articulates what he first knew as art theory. He wrote the following regarding Raphael's historical paintings: "I think his chief excellencies are, his composition, the manner in which he tells you a peace of History, and the gracefullness of his figures and force of expression. he leaves nothing unexpressed that is necessary to the subject. (the example of) Solomon (deciding) the case of the Dead Child. the Story you know. Solomon orders the living Child to be divided, the Executioner hold(s) the Child and lifts the Sword to fulfill the Kings command, when the mother rushes forward to stop the blow with one hand extended, looks to the King, and with the other points to the other Woman. you see every part of the Story is expressed." Copley to Henry Pelham, Rome, March 14, 1775, p. 032. This same letter makes reference to Webb's *Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting.*
for historical pictures as the highest rung of artistic expression appears to have influenced Copley. Art theoreticians, including Roger de Piles, reiterated the elevated station of history painting, undoubtedly influencing Copley.  

Supporting this hierarchy of art theory and the high place of history painting constituted a troubling idea for Copley: he was simply uneducated about art and thus unsure of his potential in the art world. His reading of other books only accentuated the humbleness of his educational background. George Turnbull's A Treatise on Ancient Painting was dedicated not only to Henry Lord Viscount Lordsdale but also to an education of the arts. "Right education, if it be not the one thing needful, it is at least absolutely necessary to private or public happiness." The erudition of Turnbull's work must have fascinated Copley, while it probably also awed him. Horace Walpole's Anecdotes of Painting in England might be considered somewhat gossipy with its listings of and trite characterizations of England's artists. Yet, both works posed a singular question to Copley: Did he understand enough about art to presume his artistic potential was of a world standard? His isolation in Colonial America left this question somewhat moot.

It is clear that Copley learned of the artistic significance of historical pictures from available readings. It is also clear that Copley's goal of painting historical works was, in fact, an expression of his search for education.


22 George Turnbull, A Treatise on Ancient Painting, p. V.
It is also fair to assume that Copley's belief in his abilities was incredibly strong. In his correspondence to West and Liotard, Copley sought knowledge about art in order to refine his talents. That Copley believed in his ability was sarcastically recounted in 1793 and 1794 when Copley became embroiled in a dispute within the Royal Academy. Reverend Robert Anthony Bromley of London published a two-volume *Philosophical and Critical History of the Fine Arts*, More Especially Painting which praised some and condemned other contemporary British painters. Copley, not mentioned in the work, motioned before the Academy to exclude it from the Academy library as unworthy. Acrimonious debate within the Academy and in privately circulated letters was abusive to Bromley and Copley. Bromley's remarks concerning Copley's ego are, however, revealing as they were meant to be derisive:

... (Copley was) a painter from America who, before his arrival in this country, had sent hither a squirrel as the harbinger of his fame, and very soon after his arriving, seeing a Vandyke for the first time, declared that his squirrel was every bit as good.23

Copley believed that his style of painting was conducive to historical painting. Years later, when writing to Pelham, he noted that history painting required the artist to "fix on the disposition of his figures" within the canvas.24 He would have agreed that


24 *Copley-Pelham Letters*, Copley to Henry Pelham, Parma, June 25, 1775, p. 339. Copley's conception of historical painting while in the Colonies and in the first year of his foreign travels concerned problems of design and other technical aspects of history painting.
"The history painter needed to understand psychology and physiology in order to give each character the gestures, bearing and facial expression appropriate to the situation."\textsuperscript{25} In short, all the artistic skills of line, texture, and color reached fulfillment in the historical painting. Copley believed the ability to paint historical works was a guarantee that "your fortune is secure in this life."\textsuperscript{26} In a sense, Apparent Realism was a technique integrated from what Copley learned in the Colonies. With the proper education, he believed, an historical painter required the same talent for adaptability which was evident in his development as a portrait painter. Apparent Realism was well-suited for the work he dreamed of executing. Copley was conscious of his indigenous Colonial nurturing as an artist: it molded his art. History painting, also, would benefit from the Colonial American perspective. His supreme faith in his artistic adaptability convinced him that historical portraits were within his ability. Given the opportunity, Copley would learn and master historical art. His career in the Colonies provided him this confidence.


\textsuperscript{26}Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Henry Pelham, Parma, June 25, 1775, pp. 338-339. By 1775, Copley was conversant with Sir Joshua Reynolds' theories about history painting. "History Painting, in Reynolds' terms, celebrated not an event but eventfulness itself; the episode articulated the operation of general truths. And since it demanded a painter's skill in figure, landscape, and portraiture, it was truly the master calling, the vestibule to immortality. This grand vision, emphasizing ethical objectives, technical training, universal truth and sublime subject matter was the philosophy of art American painters encountered in England at the end of the eighteenth century." Neil Harris, \textit{The Artist in American Society}, p. 12.
Copley's correspondence of 1768 and 1769 often focused on his art. Writing to Benjamin West, Copley reflected upon a portrait of Mr. Timothy Rodgers sent for exhibition in London:

For although it may be as good as my portraits generally are, yet for an Exhibition something more may be expected, and that Artist is greatly to be pitied, who cannot occasionally rise above the common level of his practice.¹

Yet the artist to be pitied may not totally have been at fault:

... I should not have had so many apologys to make for this portrait if Mr. Rodgers could have spared time to have sat as I found occasion for him... (and not) leave me to the disagreeable necessity of finishing a great part of it in his absence.²

Copley lamented the "plain head" of the portrait. Apparently, Copley's artistic consistency -- high as it was -- did not meet his even higher standards.

When discussing a crayon drawing of a "Young Lady" which accompanied the Rodgers' portrait, Copley explained:

... I am more at a loss to know what will please the Coniseur. I preferred simplissity in the dress because,

¹Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Benjamin West, Boston, January 17, 1768, pp. 66-67.

²Ibid.
should I do anything in a taste of Drapery for rain from
or contrary to what is the prevailing fashion when the
picture appears at the Exhibition, it must displease. 3

Copley implored West not to allow this painting out of his
possession after the exhibition. Apparently, Copley took the
liberty of sending the painting, without the subject or her parents
being aware that a copy of the portrait existed. 4

While Copley reiterated his intent of journeying to England,
he explicitly mentioned that money was a concern:

...whatever my ambition may be to excell in our
noble art, I cannot think of doing it at the expence of not
only my own happiness, but that of a tender Mother and
Younger Brother whose dependence is entirely upon me. 5

And yet less than a year after Copley's letter stated his
overseas plans, his life became increasingly involved. On Thanks­
giving Day, November 16, 1769, Copley married Susanna Farman Clarke.
"Sukey," as she was called, was the daughter of Richard Clarke, a
prosperous merchant with established London connections. Indeed,
Clarke was the consignee for the tea of the British East India
Company in 1773. The proposed sale of the tea, valued at £15,000,
would have been a boon for the financially ailing East India Company
as well as for Richard Clarke. Richard Clarke was immersed in the
tea controversy. On November 19, 1773, he requested in a long
impassioned letter to the Governor and Executive Council, their
"protection, assistance, and advice." 6 Clarke was particularly

3 Ibid., p. 68
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid, pp. 68-69.
6 H.H. Edes Papers, 1767-1810, R. Clarke to the Governor and
descriptive regarding the violence of the mobs.

... a great number of people assemble together. . .
and with Stones Brickbats Clubs and Cordwood Strife
continued for the space of two hours breaking the
windows and window Shutters and doing other damage.7

But the dumping of the tea into Boston Harbor dashed Clarke's
hopes, while the lucrative and illicit Holland tea trade continued.8
Copley's marriage underscored some of his youthful pessimistic musings
when he noted "I don't despair, but I shall be married as I
find mericle(s) have not ceas'd."9

Copley's letters give no insight into the origins of his
courtship with Sukey Clarke. Copley was thirty-seven years old
and earning a substantial livelihood which in 1768 was estimated
at L 300 a year. Sukey Clarke's older sister, Hannah, married
into a merchant family, the Bromfields of London. Sarah Clarke
married Charles Startin, a Philadelphia and ultimately New York
merchant.10 While not a merchant, Copley was certainly a skilled

Executive Council, November 19, 1773, Boston, Massachusetts
Historical Society.

7Ibid. By November 23, 1773, Richard Clarke left Boston
and authorized his sons, Jonathan and Isaac Winslow, to deal as
they felt appropriate with the tea.

8Oscar Theodore Barch, Jr. and Hugh Talmage Leftner, Colonial
America (New York: McMillian Press, 1968), pp. 525-529. See the
classic study of merchant motivation, Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., Colonial

9Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Peter (Pelham), September 12,

craftsman possessing social access. His work immortalized and
even glamorized those individuals much like the Clarkes.

Undoubtedly, Copley gained a family association through the
Clarkes, which enhanced his own social status. For example, on
two occasions the New Hampshire merchant, John Hurd, included
his regards for Mrs. Copley. Hurd relayed a greeting from
Governor and Mrs. Wentworth "to you and Mrs. Copley for yr.
respectful Remembrance of them."13

Hurd's letter revealed also that well into Copley's American
period he restored and repaired a damaged painting. Apparently,
Copley was not a master of restoration: "The Governor is
satisfy'd with it, tho' he hardly thinks it restor'd to its original
Beauty."14

Copley's letters indicate no tension regarding social class
concerns as a result of the marriage. Copley's observations from
his letters and his relationship with the Clarke family suggest
an openness and fluidity of social class. Differences in Copley's
income and occupation apparently did not translate into differences
in status. As I suggested by examining the social access of earlier
artists, specifically Pelham and Feke, considerable contact and
need familiarized the Colonial artist with the upper classes. I
believe it fair to assume that Copley maintained an equal footing
at least within his family. Also, a manuscript containing debits
and credits of Richard Clarke for June 30, 1774, lists Copley
as having no balance. It is probably fair to assume that Copley
borrowed money from his father-in-law while in the Colonies. Brom-
field Papers, Box 4, Yale University. Although Copley's art was
his sole means of support, at least on one occasion, he was the
recipient of a temporary subsidy. From Rome, Copley wrote, "Mr.
(Ralph) Izard has been very much my friend on this Tour, and from
Naples to Rome he would pay all my expenses, and has shown the greatest
desire possible to render me every service in his power."

12 Copley-Pelham Letters, John Hurd to Copley, Portsmouth, N.H.,
April 17, 1770, and May 4, 1770, p. 85 and p. 88.

13 Ibid., p. 88.

14 Ibid., pp. 84-85.
If the length and intensity of their courtship remain a mystery, Copley's marital devotion was evident in a number of ways. In his three-quarter length portrait, The Copley Family, completed in 17777 (Plate 12), Jules Prown indicates he celebrates the reunion with his family in England. Mrs. Copley and three children had left Boston in the spring of 1775. Remaining in the colony was their sick infant, Clarke, who subsequently died. However, the painting included four children with Richard Clarke holding Copley's first English-born child, Susanna.

In The Copley Family, Sukey appears enveloped in the adoration of her children. With tender glances and a delicate touch, the beautiful face of Copley's wife was echoed in the face of each child. Like cherubs, each child possessed full cheeks, playful smiles and radiant eyes. The painting communicates incredible animation. In this respect, in contrast, the figures of Copley and his father-in-law demonstrate a pronounced repose. Richard Clarke's three-quarter pose is on the painting's right side while Copley's eyes remain fixed within the left side of the portrait, gazing straight ahead. Although stabilizing the left side, Copley's expressions is reflective, almost beaming with pride. Through this portrait, one senses the importance of his family to him.

15 Account and business papers belonging to Richard Clarke make reference to this. First, from July, 1774 to May 16, 1775, Clarke temporarily supported Mrs. Copley and her children. Expenses for wood for the winter of 1774, cash, and passage money totaled £252.13. Bromfield Papers, Box 4, Yale University.

In his first letter to Sukey from Dover, the usually reserved and conservative Copley revealed his emotions about her:

... my Dearest Life, and my prayers for your happiness, health and safety shall at all times be offer(ed) up to the throne of Divine mercy for you and our Dear little ones, and trusting in Gods goodness that we shall not long be separated... 17

From his letters, we are able to glimpse the passionate, romantic aspects of his person. From Lyons, France, he wrote:

If you knew how great my desires were to be with you, ... I am sure I shall think that an hour of happiness that brings us together beyond any I shall enjoy till it arrives. I feel myself epsorb'd, in those tender feelings to that degree that I must restrain myself till the time of anishment is expired. 18

A postscript in a letter from Parma exudes a dependence and even sentimentality touching upon Copley and his wife: "I write every post." 19

Copley's marriage increased his financial responsibilities as it probably added to his family status, but clearly, his family also made him happy and very proud.

Another indication of Copley's increasingly complex life was the farm he purchased on the broad pastures and slopes of Beacon Hill. 20

17 Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to his wife, Dover, July 9, 1774, pp. 223-224.

18 Ibid., Copley to his wife, Lyons, September 15, 1775, pp. 256-257.

19 Theodore F. Dwight Papers, 1660-1867, Copley to his wife, July 28, 1775, Parma, Box 2, Massachusetts Historical Society.

In 1769, Copley began to acquire what would eventually be a twenty-acre farm with three houses. The property was located approximately "between Beacon and Mount Vernon Streets, running west from Walnut Street." His nearest neighbor was John Hancock, whose portrait Copley painted in 1765. Copley's Beacon Hill home was called Mount Pleasant.

Henry Pelham was placed in charge of overseeing the refurbishing and reconstruction of Mount Pleasant, while Copley visited New York City in 1771. Copley's instructions to his half-brother in the overseeing of his property were in keeping with Copley's confidence in him.

Your works, at Mount Pleasant, go on very briskly. The upper house is in its place. It has the Cellars finished the Chimneys built, the Back part erected. It makes a very noble appearance, and its situation is pleasant beyond description, beyond Idea.  

Repairs, additional construction, the purchasing of materials, and the hiring of workmen were vigilantly supervised by Pelham. And the incidental, mundane occurrences were noted, too: "Did I inform you that you are like to have a fine crop of potatoes?"

Still, Copley did not possess the degree of recognition that European exposure provided; nor had he escaped the artistic limi-

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21 Prown, John Singleton Copley, Vol. 1, pp. 64-65. Prown describes the legal struggles Copley experienced in establishing Mount Pleasant. He also details the remodeling and alterations Copley initiated in his new house.

22 Copley-Pelham Letters, Henry Pelham to Copley, September 10, 1771, p. 156.

23 Ibid., p. 156.
tations of portraiture. His marriage gave him added confidence in his career, talents, and direction of his life. This marriage marked a last hurdle in his Colonial life: from Long Wharf to his Beacon Hill estate, Copley advanced socially and financially.

Remaining unchanged was Copley's need to advance his artistic education. For while the context of his life was his art and his family, Colonial successes continued somewhat faint or hollow for a man desirous of worldwide acclaim. Sukey proved to be an enriching and stabilizing force, continuing the positive influences of family Copley fortunately enjoyed. Marriage did not make Copley complacent, but rather made him recognize increased responsibilities which only his art could address. Marriage and social advancement reinforced a lifelong feeling that developing his art was an inevitability.

Above all, Copley's marriage did not alter his plans of undertaking formal study. In a letter from London dated June 16, 1771, Benjamin West applauded Copley's musings of such a trip. On that same day, Copley began a visit to New York City for what was over a six-month stay. This first extended trip was primarily for business. And yet Copley and his wife were gratified to "... experience such a Disposition in a great many People to render us happy as

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25 Ibid., Copley to Pelham, New York, June 16, 1771, pp. 116-117.
we did not expect..."

From a business point of view, the trip was an unabashed success.

I shall do very well to finish the amount of 30 Busts in 20 weeks, besides going to Philadelphia which took up 2 weeks of the 20... I have been obliged to refuse a great deal of Business here and in Philadelphia.

Artistically, the trip produced an especially noteworthy accomplishment.

I have done some of my best portraits here, particularly Mrs. Gage's... it is beyond Compare the best Lady's portrait I ever drew;... Copley noted that the Pennsylvania artist, Matthew Pratt, commented that Mrs. Gage's portrait "will be flesh and Blood these 200 years to come, that every Part and line in it is Butifull."

His New York trip produced an exchange of correspondence between Copley and Pelham pertaining to a major distraction from his career and artistic energies. Copley was bogged down in litigation regarding his property of Mount Pleasant. As part of Mount Pleasant, Copley purchased eight and a half acres, a house, and a barn whose title was not clear. He paid L 120 or near $400, a very cheap price even for an investment liable to be contested. Contested it was.

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26 Ibid., Copley to Henry Pelham, New York, August 3, 1771, p. 136.

27 Ibid., p. 174.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

Beginning in 1769 and extending through February, 1772, a part of Copley's energies were dedicated to its every nuance. John Bannister sought ownership of the property once owned by his grandfather, Thomas Bannister. The case journeyed through the Interior and Superior Courts of Suffolk County, culminating in an apparent victory for Copley. However, no deed exists at the Suffolk Registry, possibly due to lost records. Subsequent problems over the title ensued for the purchasers of Copley's estate, the Mount Vernon Proprietors, later in 1796.

Copley was not frightened of litigation, as was indicated by his vigor in defending his interests. In letters to Pelham throughout his 1771 absence, Copley contemplated the case, his lawyers, who the presiding judge might be, and the strategy of his opponents.


32 Chamberlain, Beacon Hill, p. 65. Suffolk Registry volumes 112 and 114 disappeared, possibly in 1776 when the records were transferred from Boston to Dedham.

33 In 1773, Copley was brought to court when he contested construction costs of his house and barn. Suffolk County Courthouse, Superior Court, Office of the Clerk, Early Court Files, fol. 71, Jay v. Copley, January, 1773. Copley disputed the housewright, John Jay's, charges of over L 1000. Adjudication through referees set the charges at L 645.5. See Jules Prown, Copley, Vol. 1, p. 65.

34 Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Pelham, New York, November 24, 1771, pp. 175-177. Copley's impatience with judicial delays and his lawyers emerges in this correspondence. "You say of my Action it is to come on the 10 Day of Decr.; but why was it not try'd at the Novr. Adjournment?. . . . if the Court met this month I shall
Yet the significance of these events was that they deflected Copley's energies. "I am fatigued," he wrote his brother, "but must say something first about my lawsuit."35 Neither marriage nor his acquisition of an... allowed the artist the time — and insularity — to work at his professional advancement. Certainly, from 1769 to 1773, Copley's educational development was stymied. At least in part, these circumstances accounted for West's response of June, 1771, apparently having been assured Copley was to leave for England. That Copley did not follow through and leave for European study in 1771 was due to his artistic success, his marriage and his legal woes. These factors forced him to remain in the Colonies. Ironically, what he strove to achieve in terms of material success and property became debilitating in the time, energy, and concentration which he needed for his work. Had he wished to practice his profession and protect his property holdings, Copley could have weathered the nuisances of litigation. Without being cavalier about his achievements, Copley wanted more from his career than an estate. Simply, Copley's concern for education progress remained thwarted by a life in the Colonies, and his letter from think hard of Coll Putnam (James Putnam, at least one lawyer Copley consulted) for putting it off --- I have now been waiting upwards of 12 months for his assistance. . . . " Two additional letters regarding Copley's legal concerns are on file at the Massachusetts Historical Society. One is to James Putnam dated November 12, 1771 (Miscellaneous Bound Documents, 1771) and the other is in the Robert Trent Pain Papers dated February 22, 1772. Both the letters are from Copley asking time for consultation in planning his case.

35 Ibid., p. 174
West of June, 1771, evidences this fact. The multitude of familial and professional responsibilities were readily manageable. The point is that Copley was heroic in his ardor to expand upon his understanding of art to discover whether he did have a place in a wider art world.
CHAPTER 8

AN ARTISTIC EMIGRE

There was probably no single moment or incident when Copley decided to leave the Colonies. While he occasionally wrote despairingly of Colonial appreciation of the arts, he was busily employed and consistently practiced his profession. But earning a living was not the equivalent of realizing his dreams nor, indeed, of making a life.

Copley's artistic growth was crucial to him. The paintings not yet painted and the acclaim not yet received still remained elusive to him. In England, in the mainstream of the art world, however, he might attain the fame he believed he could earn, since he could not be satisfied as a talented but untrained country cousin. He dreamed of and demanded a place in the context of the eighteenth century art world.

Copley overcame the disadvantages of an artist in Colonial America by teaching himself, by reading, and by learning from all who had something to teach. He refused, as well, to accept his geographical limits which he probably viewed as an accident of birth, to inhibit his development. Rather, Copley's decision to leave was rooted in his identity as an artist. The opinions of his friends and family, as well as the philosophy of the political struggle, were incidental in his decision to leave the Colonies. Copley was a liberated man in that learning and individual growth
possessed him. These characteristics were ingrained in his being and ultimately they could not be compromised. Neither financial gain nor political tumult influenced his decision to leave the Colonies.

On November 8, 1773, Benjamin West received long awaited news from Copley that he was to begin his European studies. West's reply, dated January 6, 1774, encouraged the idea and offered some advice:

As your journey to Italy is rather to finish a studye than to begin one; Your stay in that country will not requier thatlength of time that would be necessary for an Artist less advanced in the Arts than you are; But I would have that time as uninterupted as possible. And for this reason I would have you make this Tour without Mrs. Copley. Not that would be of any great additional expense, But would throw you out of your studyes.¹

Perhaps, such thoughts had already occurred to Copley. Why did Copley wait as long as he did before leaving the Colonies?²

James Thomas Flexner has alluded to Copley's childhood fear of the sea as a result of working and living on Long Wharf. Flexner intimates that Copley's years in his mother's tobacco shop not only exposed him to rough characters aboard sea-going vessels, but also to the tumult and potential uncertainties of the ocean itself which apparently horrified Copley. Indeed, in one of Copley's more

¹Copley-Pelham Letters, Benjamin West to Copley, London, January 6, 1773, p. 194.

²Besides frequently mentioning to West his intention of leaving America, Copley also told members of his wife's family of his intentions. In 1772, his brother-in-law Charles Startin wrote to Isaac Clarke that "(Copley) tells me he is to embark for England immediately." Philadelphia, May 23, 1773. Bromfield Papers, Yale University.
revealing letters to his wife after having learned of her and their children's safe arrival in England, Copley agonized over the dangers of ocean travel. Flexner maintains that his fear of the ocean deterred the artist from pursuing his art studies in Europe prior to his departure in 1774.

Flexner's speculations on Copley's ocean phobia are corroborated by what Flexner calls Copley's representation of a nightmare, his 1778 work Watson and the Shark.

In the foreground a naked and defenseless swimmer sprawls in a contortion of anguish; he is being attacked by a shark. Behind him several men in a small boat gesture to bring assistance when assistance seems past hope. And the water in which the victim founders is a sickly yellow-green, a stringy and repulsive element in which naked men are attacked by monsters.

Copley's feeling of revulsion toward the sea was equalled by his sympathy for the sea-going man's struggle for survival. The narrative of Watson and the Shark alludes to the life Copley experienced as a youth and then escaped as an adult.

Other reasons may have urged Copley to risk the voyage by sea. Political events in Boston threatened his father-in-law, Richard Clarke. In a letter to his son, Isaac, Clarke mentioned his desire to "spend this winter with Mr. Copley," seeking safety

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3 Theodore F. Dwight Papers, 1660-1867, Copley to his Wife, Parma, July 28, 1775, Massachusetts Historical Society.


and a degree of quietude. This same danger may have put Copley's future in jeopardy when he defended Clarke's role in the importation of "Tea into the Town." Later, Copley explained to his brother-in-law that:

I made use of every argument my thoughts could suggest to draw the people from their unfavourable opinion of you, and to convince them your opposition was neither the effect of obstinacy or unfriendliness to the community; but altogether from necessity on your part to discharge a trust committed to you, a failure in would subject you to ruin in your reputation as merchants.

The precariousness of Clarke's position and Copley's rationale did not alter "their opinions who are but too much disposed to believe the Worst of you (Clarke) and are not at all solicitous to look into the facts and vew them with candor and impartiality. Yet, Copley viewed the rancorous incident over the tea in a rather dispassionate way. Although a member of his family was involved in the politics of the problem, Copley's remarks were

6 H. H. Edes Papers, 1767-1810, Richard Clarke to Isaac Clarke, August 9, 1774, Massachusetts Historical Society.

7 Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Jonathan and Isaac Winslow Clarke (sons of Richard Clarke), December 1, 1773, pp. 211-212. In a letter from Copley's sister-in-law, Sarah Starlin, to Isaac Clarke, she communicates knowledge of Copley's plans for going to England. Sarah Starlin to Isaac Clarke, Philadelphia, February 6, 1773, Miscellaneous Bound Papers, 1770-1773, Massachusetts Historical Society.

8 Copley-Pelham Letters, Copley to Richard Clarke, Boston, February 15, 1774, p. 214. Copley offered that his father-in-law's problems were exacerbated by the newspapers and that "many Callumneys in the Newspapers ought to be contradicted." Copley intimates that neither the newspaper nor the Massachusetts General Court were particularly interested in presenting the facts regarding the importance of the tea. The difficulty Copley and Richard Clarke encountered is presented in greater depth in Philip Davidson's Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763-1783, Part II, Chapters 14, 15, 16 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941).
impartial, tempered and analytical.

However, in April, 1774, a manifestation of Boston's frenzied atmosphere was directed at Copley. It began when Colonial George Watson, a mandamus counsellor from Plymouth, visited Copley and Isaac Winslow Clarke on the evening of April 25, 1774. At about midnight "a number of persons came to the house, knock'd at the front door, and awoke Sukey and myself they asked me if Mr. Watson was in the house."9

I told them he was not. . . . they then said he had been there. . . . he was gone. . . . out of the town. . . . they believed he was here, and if he was they would know it, and my blood would be on my head. . . .10

As Copley recounted the incident he reflected, "what if Mr. Watson had stayed (as I pressed him to) to spend the night. I must either have given up a friend to the insult of a Mob or had my house pulled down and perhaps my family murthered."11 Copley's experience with the mob sustains the contentions of Pauline Maier that the crowd was restrained and controlled.12 It is a fact, though, that the

9 Ibid., Copley to Isaac Winslow Clarke, Boston, April 26, 1774, pp. 217-219.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Pauline Maier, From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776 (New York: Vantage Press, 1974), Chapter One. As Maier contends, it was the mobs, acting for the people, who promoted the public welfare. Whig resistance against unlawful acting ministers of government, such as a "Rogue and Villin" as Colonial George Watson, was in keeping with Whig ideology of restraint and resistance. In February, 1775, Henry Pelham related his own experience of encountering a hostile country mob. Henry Pelham to Copley, Boston, February 16, 1775, Copley Pelham Letters, pp. 289-293.
people who were most intimate with and influential upon Copley were rabid Tories. Included in this group were Henry Pelham, the Clarke family, and at least half of Copley's clientele. Comments by Henry Pelham typified the thought of Copley's family:

Now we see this very Country arming themselves and un-supported by any foreign Power ungenerously Waging War against their great Benefactors, and endeavouring to Ruin that State to whom they owe their being, Whose Justice and Generosity has fostered them to the(i)r late flourishing and Happy Condition, and whose arms has protected them in the uninterrupted Enjoyment of all the blessings of Peace.13

Henry Pelham was personally embittered at particular revolutionaries dating back to 1769. At that time, two regiments of British troops were stationed in Boston. In town meetings, the citizens were angered at "employing such army for the enforcing of laws made without the consent of the people." Anger escalated into violence: five Bostonians were killed and six wounded. The Boston Massacre of 1770 exacerbated the seething tensions between the Colonies and Parliament.

Henry Pelham crafted a plate as a commemoration piece on the event. However, Paul Revere apparently did too. Pelham felt betrayed by Revere as he wrote to the silversmith:

when I heard that you were cutting a plate of the late murder I thought it impossible, as I knew you was not capable of doing it unless you copied it from

13 Copley-Pelham Letters, Henry Pelham to Susanna Copley, Boston, July 23, 1775, p. 345.

mine and as I thought I had entrusted it in
(Pelham's version) the hands of a person who had
more regard to the dictates of Honour and Justice
than to take the undue advantage you have done of
the confidence and trust I reposed in you. . . .
If you are insensible of the Dishonour you have
brought on yourself by this act, the world will not be so. 15

There is no record of Revere's response, but, of course, the Revere
plate was enormously successful, although Revere's biographer,
Esther Forbes, suggests not art or profit but revolution was upper-
most in Revere's mind. 16 Interestingly, Forbes all but concedes
the theft of Pelham's idea.

Pelham's letter of March 29, 1770, to Paul Revere referred
to the Boston Massacre as "the late Murder." The fact that
Pelham crafted a commemorative plate, in light of his characteriza-
tion of the event, might indicate anti-establishment inclinations,
but more exhaustive reading of his letters alters this impression.
Indeed, after having viewed "the important Battle and Victory
at Charlestown. . . which I had with my telescope a very perfect
but melancholy view," Pelham began a survey of Charlestown with
"permission from Gen'l Gage and Gen'l Howe, who were polite eno
to grant me a general Pass directed to all Officers commanding
guards for going to and returning from Charlestown." 17

Pelham went on to explain the rationale for his work, revealing

15 Copley-Pelham Letters, Henry Pelham to Paul Revere, Boston,
March 29, 1770, p. 83.

16 Esther Forbes, Paul Revere and the World He Lived In

17 Copley-Pelham Letters, Pelham to Susanna Copley, Boston,
July 23, 1775, p. 344.
his political sentiments.

This plan when finished will give a good idea of the battle and I propose sending Howe (to Britain?) a copy to be engraved, together with a view of it as it appears in its present ruins, with the encampment on the hills behind it. I have often passed Doct Warren's grave. I have felt a disagreeable sensation, thus to see a townman an old acquaintance unbound ambition to an untimely death and thus early to realise that ruin which a lust for power and domination has brought himself partly through his means upon this unhappy country.18

Elsewhere Pelham demonstrated his Tory loyalties as well as his inability to work at his livelihood:

I find myself extremely perplexed. I am entirely at a loss to know what to do. The total stoppage of business forbids me remaining here, and how to leave the place I don't know. . . . It is now a twelve month since I have done any business worth naming. What money I had oweing to me I can't get a farthing (sic) off, and what business I had in hand the cruelty of the times has rendered unprofitable.19

Copley and Pelham agreed on the dislocation of people's lives caused by the war. In fact, both men sought means of escape for their mother and other family members from the uncertainties of political disorder.

Pelham reaffirmed to his brother that the business of portraiture was all but finished in the Colonies under existing conditions. Survival took precedence over the question of when they could resume practicing. Perhaps it was for the sake of practicing his art in Britain that Copley urged Pelham not to bear arms against the authorities:

18 Ibid., pp. 346-347.

19 Ibid., Henry Pelham to Copley, October 10, 1775, Boston, p. 361.
... (If) called to Arm yourself. ... it is my injunction that you do not comply with such a requi(s)tion. ... 20

Yet Copley was not unduly influenced by friends, family or immediate threats. As an artist and political observer, he was characteristically perceptive:

... The Americans have it in their power to baffle all that England can do against them. I don't mean to ward off the evils attendant on Civil War, but so far as never to be subdued, so that Oceans of blood will be shed to humble a people which they never will subdue and the Americans from the Id(ea) that England would not act against them have tempted its Power to the extremum and dr(awn) all its weight (of) rage upon them, and after they have with various success deluged the Country in Blood the Issue will be that the Americans will be a free independent people.21

In one of the few instances of Copley's extensive European correspondence with Henry Pelham, no mention was made of art technique. Copley's letter focused upon the American scene with a personal vision usually reserved for his portraits.

... it is a pleasing reflection that I shall stand amongst the first of the Artists that shall have led that Country to the knowledge and cultivation of the fine arts. ... 22

20 Ibid., Copley to Henry Pelham, Parma, July 15, 1775, p. 343.

21 Ibid., Copley to Henry Pelham, Parma, August 6, 1775, pp. 348-349. Copley was distressed over the troubles in Boston because of the "... Valuable Friends in that place I am still exceedingly distressed." Charles Henry Hart Autograph Collection, John Singleton Copley to William Humphrey, July 2, 1775, Parma. Archives of American Art.

22 Ibid., Copley to Henry Pelham, Rome, March 14, 1775, p. 301. Twenty-four years after that letter, Copley wrote a letter to then Governor Samuel Adams of Massachusetts introducing his son: "... he goes to his native country." Bancroft Papers, John Singleton Copley to Governor Samuel Adams, October 8, 1795. Archives of American Art.
Copley's determination to educate himself, to perfect the technique of apparent realism, and to advance himself through historical art was undeterred by revolution or by family. He was neither a Tory nor a Revolutionary. He probably represented a great many people who sought no political or ideological connection. Copley's attitude toward the Colonies was without identity or attachment because he was so singular minded. Years earlier, he reflected that"... my Bondage... is of a much more binding nature than the tie of a Country."23 Guernsey Jones, the compiler of Copley's letters, observed, "He was an artistic, not a political emigre."24 During this time from 1766 through 1772, Copley submitted eight paintings for Academy exhibitions, and none of them were enthusiastically received. Unfortunately, the success of his Colonial practice was little comfort to him. His art needed the enhancement of foreign study.

Copley's American portraits echo a common restraint, although they reflect the diversity and vigor of Colonial peoples. Each portrait remains an historical and psychological statement commenting upon wealth, social status, religion, work and even politics. Seen as a whole, Copley's portraits depict the richness of the Colonial experience.25 It's clear that Copley understood

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23 Ibid., Copley to Peter (Pelham), Boston, September 12, 1776, p. 47.


25 Benjamin West believed that his own education as an artist was immeasurably influenced by being born an American. West suggested that he was thus "grounded... in the Knowledge of
the strength of America and even predicted her political and artistic triumphs. For example, George Carter, a brief travelling companion of Copley's on the continent, states about Copley, "My companion is solacing himself, that if they go on in American for an hundred years to come, as they have for an hundred and fifty years past, they shall have an independent government. The woods will be cleared. . . art would then be encouraged there and great artists would arise."26

And yet Copley's dreams outdistanced Colonial life: to become a master painter, a painter of history, challenged the essence of his being. His study of the masters was intended to reassure him of his own abilities. While his personality required reassurance, his spirit needed acclaim. Steadfastly, Copley refused to relegate his art to the status of a craft, and his Colonial portraits are a testament to this ideal. In subsequent years, a contemporary referred to him as "the most mulish aimal I have ever encountered."27 Copley pursued his education in exactly that way. That Copley chose his art and education above all other considerations is not surprising.

Nature;" and had he been born or come to Europe earlier, "I should have known nothing but the Receipts of Masters." Further, West believed that the intuitive, self-taught education was quite valuable, particularly if the artist possessed "so great a share of Genius." That West believed the isolation of nature, hard work, and "Genius" could aid an artist was due to his career: "The most fortunate Circumstance that could have happen'd to me." And to an even greater extent, these circumstances exemplify Copley's American education and career. See Copley-Pelham Letters, Benjamin West to Shrimpton Hutchinson, London, June 17, 1774, pp. 118-119.

26 Quoted from Robert C. Alberts, Benjamin West: A Biography, pp. 118-119.

27 Miscellaneous Bound Documents, Massachusetts Historical Society, Michael Joy to Benjamin Joy, Boston, December, 1810.
SUMMARY

What emerges from an analysis of Copley's technique, portrayal of subject matter, and emphasis upon character analysis is the purpose to educate himself. He was rooted in the indigenous traditions of Colonial art, and from these traditions he extracted ideas from which his own work developed. Works of Pelham, Smibert, and especially Feke, were the sources of his earliest education. Colonial efforts toward individualized portraiture distinguished eighteenth century American art. Through Apparent Realism Copley analyzed the lives, experiences, and character of his subjects. Subsequently, his Colonial portraits became statements of his own artistic sensitivities; above all, his portraits explored a subject's presence in the Colonial world. In a portrait of the Boston merchant, Epes Sargent, Copley executed a likeness which was individualized beyond the ken of his Colonial predecessors, particularly his impasto treatment of Sargent's hand. James Flexner has written that "Copley became so fascinated with the thick fleshiness of the powerful fingers that he painted them exactly as they were... almost obscenely full of blood and life."¹ The point is that Copley's American portraits were the products of an educational legacy from which Copley profited. His Colonial portraits were educational experiments, testifying to his demanding need for growth. He sought

¹James Flexner, John Singleton Copley, pp. 32-33.
to achieve more than the faithful depiction of details; he sought the very essence and soul of his subjects. The quest of this essence of character had been the legacy of Colonial art.

Additionally, Copley was educated by his personal relationship and responsibilities to his step-brother, Henry Pelham. No single individual, until his marriage, was as intimately associated with Copley's professional work or daily pressures as was Pelham. Copley's love for Pelham was matched by his concern over Pelham's health and career. It was this very precariousness of his step-brother's battle with infection and inner ear problems which weighed on Copley, and was ultimately manifested by the artist in the portrait *Boy with Squirrel*. Pelham was the embodiment of Copley's own fatherless condition as they both wallowed in financial and artistic uncertainty. Certainly, Copley's sensitivity as an artist was influenced by such an individual who was central in his early life. The Copley-Pelham relationship was a microcosm of the problems associated with artistic advancement and recognition sought by both men; also, the relationship exhibited philosophical differences between the brother, including their reactions to revolution. Nevertheless, Pelham served as intermediary to Copley's lawyers in Copley's absence; he was his foreman at Mt. Pleasant, and his purchasing agent securing supplies for Copley's profession. Most importantly, he served Copley as apprentice, student, and confidante. In other words, Pelham was a pivotal figure within Copley's career. He deserved Copley's affection and attention, and even the immortality *Boy with Squirrel* has given him.
Pelham's delicate health struck a sympathetic response in Copley, as did Pelham's quest for an artistic career. Clearly, their mutual bond provided Copley a source of encouragement in his American years.

The greatest dilemma of these years for the artist developed as a result of success. That is, would Copley's career only be a vehicle for gaining social status and achieving financial security? Copley was aware of the artistic careers of his step-father and other Colonial artists. He was adamant that his art was significant, irrespective of financial gain which, of course, motivated him. But Copley demanded greater clarity as to what his profession was. He practiced his profession without the financial distractions his step-father, Smibert, and Feke encountered. Copley believed that the elevation of the fine arts must be steadfastly adhered to. While he sought social status, he believed that his recognition as an artist would guarantee his status. Copley's American career demonstrated the social access and receptivity which an artist of the first rank enjoyed. In particular, Copley recognized that his self-education must continue and progress to avoid the artistic stagnation, inherent, he believed, in the Colonial demand for portraiture. It was Copley's desire to define what an artist was that led to conclusions regarding the primacy of his work and educational advancement, and not financial rewards or social status in America. As Copley understood the role of the artist, in his self-education, Copley believed his art and not his geography characterized his life. The Colonial legacy of the portrait
painters' struggle for respect and a livelihood instructed Copley as to the pitfalls of a Colonial artist. Only continued education in the history of art, and in the creation of historical works of art would enhance his position as an artist. And it was Copley's conclusion that his development as an artist could not be realized in Colonial America.

Beyond his familiarity with the lives of Colonial artists, Copley was a student of art and historical literature. Out of these studies, Copley identified with and dreamed of emulating the works of the masters. Copley's self-education led him to appreciate the historical continuity within the art world. It was to those individuals who appreciated this historical connection, and especially to contemporary artists, that Copley sought acceptance. In a sense, Copley believed that the work of the artist transcended geography, nationality, and, particularly, transitory political problems. In no way did Copley perceive these ideas as idealistic. Rather, the heart of his conservatism was his belief in the propriety of the fine arts as essential to a civilized life.

John Singleton Copley was a self-educated artist. He sought, however, more than a limner's likeness or a limner's career. Copley believed portraiture to be a fine art and thus somewhat lofty in its goals. His portraits explored a subject's individuality and even identity. As such, Copley wove a Colonial ambience into his American works. Clearly, his development as a painter grew out of a Colonial artistic legacy from which he was educated and which emanated from his family and home.
Most importantly, Copley was a student of art history, art technique, and the meaning of art. He was fascinated with elevating his talents beyond the expectations of earlier Colonial painters. Similarly, it was the need for a more comprehensive education which, he believed, would distinguish his career. Still, Copley's American education should be seen as central to understanding this extraordinarily talented figure. It was his intense motivation to educate himself which underlies Copley's life and works.
APPENDIX
## APPENDIX

THE WORKS OF JOHN SINGLETON COLEY
REFERRED TO IN THIS DISSERTATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1765</td>
<td>Boy with Squirrel</td>
<td>Copley's half-brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1767-68</td>
<td>Mary Warner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1765-50</td>
<td>Paul Revere</td>
<td>Silversmith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1755-57</td>
<td>Thomas Ainslie</td>
<td>Collector, Port of Quebec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Miflin</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Izard</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>Mary Charnock</td>
<td>Mother of John Greenwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1754-55</td>
<td>Galatea</td>
<td>Historical painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1754-55</td>
<td>The Return of Neptune</td>
<td>Historical painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1754-55</td>
<td>Mars, Venus, and Vulcan</td>
<td>Historical painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Timothy Rodgers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1765</td>
<td>John Hancock</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1777</td>
<td>The Copley Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>Watson and the Shark</td>
<td>Sailor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Epes Sargent</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
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ILLUSTRATIONS
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Notebooks

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The Notebooks of John Smibert (Boston, 1869), Massachusetts Historical Society.

Public Records


Other Primary Sources


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BOOKS

Historians have reconstructed biographical data about Copley and have compiled lists of his paintings. The following works are noteworthy for this: August Thorndike Perkins, *A Sketch of the Life and a List of the Works of John Singleton Copley* (1783); Martha Babcock Amory, *The Domestic and Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley* (1882); Frank Bagley, *The Life and Works of John Singleton Copley* (1915); Barbara Neville Parker and Anne Bolling Wheeler, *John Singleton Copley: American Portraits in Oil, Pastel, and Miniature, with Biographical Sketches* (1938).

Historiographically, James Thomas Flexner's works shifted the focus of Copley's study away from attribution. In his *American Painting: First Flowers of Our Wilderness* (1947), Flexner related Copley's art to the development of American culture and society. His more specialized biography, *John Singleton Copley* (1948) and a revised version, *The Double Adventure of John Singleton Copley: First Major Painter of the New World* (1969) continued examining the artist within the framework of American society and thought. While Flexner's works are distinguished as popular history, his insight is often imaginative. Flexner's writing exudes a tremendous enthusiasm.

Of a more scholarly nature is Jules David Prown's, *John Singleton Copley* (1966) in two volumes. Prown's work combines
Copley biography, attribution and art analysis of his American and English works. Prown's work, a classic study, was invaluable to me.


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