



Michael's Museum

FEATURING ANTIQUE MINIATURE PORTRAITS
OF THE TORMEY-HOLDER COLLECTION

FEATURED ARTIST: NATHANIEL HANCOCK (1762-1833)

by Michael I. Tormey

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The passage of time has not been kind to the legacy of Nathaniel Hancock. Sadly, as is the case with several artists of his era, the record of his life and career has largely faded into obscurity, leaving him described in historical tomes as “a little-known miniaturist”.^{1, 2, 3} Research has nonetheless brought new information to the surface that, while not answering all questions about Hancock, sheds considerably more light on the early American artist’s life and work.

THE ARTIST’S ORIGINS

One of the biggest mysteries that remains about the life of Nathaniel Hancock is the story of his origins. While we can deduce from his newspaper obituary that he was born in about 1762 (he was said to have been 71 years old when he died in 1833)⁴, it has been difficult to determine his place of birth and the identity of his parents.

Historian Dale T. Johnson suggests that Hancock was of European origins. In her *American Portrait Miniatures in the Manney Collection*, she attributes to Hancock a Boston newspaper advertisement of June 28, 1792 that reads, “an European artist who takes the most correct Likenesses...”⁵ Upon examination of the specific ad Johnson references however (a copy of which can be seen herein in fig. 2), it is obvious that it is not by Hancock. Not only does the ad lack the artist’s name (Hancock always included his name in his ads), but its general content differs greatly from any advertisements known to be by Hancock.



Figure 1:

Self-Portrait of the Artist

by Nathaniel Hancock

circa 1791-1792

watercolor on ivory; housed under glass in a
cartridge-edged, gold case

1 3/8 x 1 3/4 inches (sight)

Mabel Brady Garvan Collection,
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut;
museum accession number 1946.303

Historian Theodore Bolton alternatively suggests that Hancock was more likely English.⁶ No evidence has ever surfaced to indicate that this was actually the case, however. Additionally, one imagines that, had Hancock been English or had he studied in London, he might have mentioned such facts in his newspaper ads, as many immigrant artists of his era did.

Rather than being European or English, it is this author's belief that Hancock was actually American-born. It is further believed that he was born in Massachusetts and that he was most likely descended from the Nathaniel Hancock (1596-1642) who, in the 1630s, emigrated from Lancashire, England and settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts (and after whom many Hancock descendants were named). While this cannot be proven without first identifying Hancock's parents and documenting their lineage, it seems most probable.

EARLY PERIOD

Just as Hancock's origins remain a mystery, details of his youth and education remain equally elusive. That is not to suggest that there are no research leads worth investigating, as there were a number of Nathaniel Hancocks present in New England in the late eighteenth century; but, thus far, it has been difficult to tie any of these individuals to the identity of Nathaniel Hancock the miniature painter.

The earliest documentation of Hancock as an artist dates to December, 1789, when he published newspaper advertisements announcing his studio on Federal Street in Boston. In those ads, he promoted his services as both a miniature painter and a designer of hair work (sometimes spelled as hairwork -- small, elaborate works of art made from human hair, typically created as memorials and often mounted to the reverse of miniature portraits).⁷ (See fig. 3.)

Most interestingly, these ads of December, 1789 also specifically announce Hancock's *return* to Boston ("Mr. Hancock begs leave to inform his friends and the publick [sic.] that he has returned to Boston..."⁸ The

No. 13, CORNHILL,
Boston, June 9, 1792.
MINIATURE and PROFILE
Painting & Hair-Work,
With an EXHIBITION, to continue
for sixteen days.
AN European Artist, who
 takes the most correct Likenesses, in
 any position of countenance, in four minutes,
 and finishes in an elegant style of painting; as
 miniatures at 2, 3, and 4 guineas; a Profile
 Painting at 4 dollars, a gilt frame and glass
 included, and elegant Devices in Hair on mo-
 derate terms. His Paintings of the Royal
 Family of France, the Marquis Fayette, and
 other specimens of his works, which may be
 seen every day gratis, will best speak his abili-
 ties. The exhibition of the wonderful effects
 of the following curious Glasses, Drafts and
 Paintings, to be seen from 10 to 3 o'clock
 every day, at half a dollar each person, which
 will entitle them to a correct likeness of Gen-
 eral Washington. The Polyzoophian Delinea-
 tor, and Phyllognometre which reduces the
 human countenance, or other object, to any
 size; and fixes it with all its tints and shades,
 until painted. Also a view of the Palace in
 which the Royal Family of France were con-
 fined; the destruction of the Bastille—with
 upwards of 200 elegant Devices, for Hair,
 and many other beautiful views and Paintings,
 &c. Each person sitting for a likeness will be
 entitled to an Exhibition gratis.—The Artist
 will not delay beyond the time advertised—
 hopes Ladies and Gentlemen will attend.

Figure 2:

This lengthy eighteenth century newspaper advertisement by an unnamed artist was presumed by historian Dale T. Johnson to have been published by Nathaniel Hancock; and it formed the basis for her belief that Hancock emigrated from Europe to the United States. Comparing this ad side by side with ads known to have been by Hancock, however, it is obvious that it was published by another artist. Throughout the years, Hancock's ads were smaller, more briefly worded, and always contained his name. Never did he make mention, as the anonymous artist of this ad did, to have painted portraits of the royal family of France, the Marquis Fayette [sic.], George Washington, etc.

("Independent Chronicle", Boston, Massachusetts, June 28, 1792 edition, Vol. XXIV, Issue 1235, page 4.)

miniature painter would have been 27 years old at the time – a fact that leads one to wonder about several possible scenarios regarding his earlier years. Might Hancock have been raised in Boston? Might he instead have been studying art in Boston and become displaced by the Revolutionary War? Alternatively, might he simply have been living the life of a young, itinerant artist, traveling throughout New England in search of painting commissions? Unless additional records surface documenting Hancock's life prior to 1789, we may never know the answers to these questions; but, based on the text of his ads, we know without doubt that the artist was present in Boston prior to 1789.

Sixteen months after Hancock's ads first appeared in Boston, he again appeared in the same newspaper, when it was announced that the miniature painter had married Elizabeth ("Betsey") Welsh (recorded in some sources as Welch) on April 27, 1791.⁹ Betsey was one of several daughters of the wealthy Boston merchant John Welsh and his wife, Mary Parker.

Hancock's father-in-law, John Welsh, maintained a large home and storefront on Boston's Union Street where, in addition to hardware and luxury goods, he also sold a variety of tools and supplies used by goldsmiths, jewelers and watch makers.¹⁰ Of course, many of these same supplies would have also been used by miniature painters when assembling and adding finishing touches to the frames their miniature portraits were mounted in -- leading one to wonder if Hancock might have been one of Welsh's customers. Might this have been how Hancock originally met Betsey, his wife-to-be?

Dating to the same timeframe is a well-known miniature self-portrait by Hancock (see fig. 1) presumed to have been painted in 1791 or 1792. Robin Jaffee Frank suggests that Hancock painted this self-portrait as a gift for his bride.¹¹ This seems a logical assumption, given that museum conservators have discovered that Hancock placed a portion of a heart playing card (surely intended to be symbolic) behind his portrait, hidden inside its gold locket case. (The miniature has since 1946 been in the possession of the Yale University Art Gallery, where it has been examined and studied extensively.)

In the Tormey-Holder Collection is an early miniature by Hancock that is housed in the same type of cartridge-edged, gold case that the artist's own self-portrait is. (See figs 4 and 5.) It has been suggested that Hancock himself may have fabricated these cases, as it was previously thought that he might have been trained as a goldsmith. Hancock did indeed mention in some later newspaper advertisements that he would "furnish handsome settings, either English or American, made at reasonable prices,"¹² which might imply that he assembled various components into finished products. No evidence has ever surfaced, however, that would suggest that he himself made the various components. (i.e., It may be fair to refer to Hancock as a jeweler of sorts, at least with respect to the assembly of and finishing of miniature portrait frames; but it would be a stretch to believe he was also a goldsmith.)

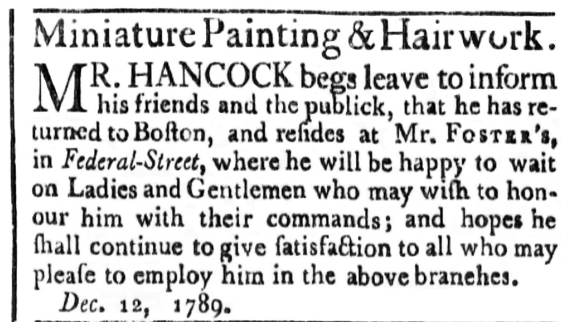


Figure 3:

Although this was the first of Hancock's newspaper advertisement in Boston, it also proves that the artist was present in that city prior to 1789, as evidenced by the text, "Mr. Hancock begs leave to inform his friends and the publick [sic.], that he has returned to Boston..."

("Massachusetts Centinel", Boston, Massachusetts, December 12, 1789 edition, Volume XII, Issue 26, page 105.)

Carrie Rebora Barratt and Lori Zabar astutely observe that that cartridge-edged, gold cases/loquets first appeared in Dublin, Ireland and that they were made popular in Boston by the likes of John Ramage, an Irish-born miniature portrait painter who, unlike Hancock, is well documented as having also been a goldsmith.¹³ Revolutionary War patriot and Boston goldsmith Paul Revere is also known to have fabricated such cartridge-edged cases for miniature portraits. (A miniature portrait of his wife, Rachel Walker Revere, painted by Joseph Dunckerley, is housed in just such a case. It has since 1935 been a holding of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and is viewable online).¹⁴

AFFLICTED BY TRAGEDY

One year after the Hancock's marriage, Betsey gave birth to a daughter, Caroline Elizabeth Hancock, on March 8, 1792.¹⁵ Tragically, a short two months later, on May 3, 1792, Betsey passed away, presumably due to lingering complications related to childbirth.¹⁶

Nathaniel Hancock never remarried after the death of Betsey. Rather, it appears that he relied on support of the Welsh family in the raising of his new-born daughter. Betsey's younger sister, Sarah Welsh, in particular, seems to have played a large role in the raising of young Caroline. Sarah, whom herself never married, spent most of her life living in her father's large Union Street home; and it seems logical to assume, therefore, that Caroline spent much of her childhood in the same home. During much of this time, in fact, it is believed that Nathaniel Hancock himself also maintained living quarters in the Welshes' Union Street home.

Offering evidence of the close relationship Caroline Elizabeth Hancock enjoyed with the Welshes, she was named a beneficiary of her grandfather John Welsh's estate, upon his death in 1812.¹⁷ Caroline in turn, upon her own death in 1838, left her entire estate to her aunt Sarah, who outlived her.¹⁸ Amongst the personal possessions left to her aunt were two miniature portraits painted by Caroline's father: one of



Figure 4:

**Federalist Era Gentleman (Possibly a Ship's Captain)
Wearing a Double Breasted Coat with Gold Buttons**

by Nathaniel Hancock

circa 1785-1790

watercolor on ivory; housed under glass in a cartridge-edged, gold case (same type of case in which Hancock placed his own self-portrait).

1 1/4 x 1 3/4 inches (sight)

Tormey-Holder Collection



Figure 5:

A side view of the cartridge-edging of the case pictured in figure 4. From this angle, one can better appreciate how the edging technique got its name, as it gives the appearance of a row of tiny gun cartridges.

herself (inscribed “Caroline Elizabeth Hancock” to the reverse) and one of her mother, Betsey (inscribed “Caroline’s mother” to the reverse). These miniatures continued to pass down through later generations of the Welsh family, most of whom had relocated to Ohio. They were, in 1899, last known to be in the possession of a Welsh descendant by the name of A. C. Smith, of Painesville, Ohio.¹⁹

Interestingly, Nathaniel Hancock’s own miniature self-portrait was not passed down through the Welsh family. Rather, at some point after his wife Betsey’s death, Hancock gifted his self-portrait to a family friend, Nathaniel Forster of Framingham, Massachusetts.²⁰ After having passed through several generations of the Forster family, the miniature was later acquired by a collector and was ultimately, in 1946, gifted to the Yale University Art Gallery.²¹

EVOLVED PAINTING STYLE

After Betsey’s death, a year and a half passed before Hancock again began promoting his services as a miniature painter when, in November, 1793, he advertised having a studio on Boston’s Tremont Street.²² (See fig. 6.) It is not known whether he was inactive during the interim eighteen months or whether he simply promoted his services by means other than newsprint.

A mere four months later, new ads by Hancock appeared, notifying patrons that he had abandoned his Tremont Street studio in favor of a chamber on Court Street, “over Maj. Johnston’s Painting-Room”.²³ (See fig. 7.)

Research reveals that this Maj. Johnston on Court Street was none other than John Johnston (1753-1819), a painter of full-sized portraits in oil who had served with distinction in the Revolutionary War. It is not known what prompted Hancock’s association with Johnston; but astute observers will note that Hancock’s work during the mid 1790s evolved in a way that indicates influence by the older portrait



Figure 6:

After the death of his wife Betsey, a year and a half passed before ads by Hancock again appeared in Boston, in November, 1793, at which time Hancock advertised having a studio on Tremont Street.

(“Columbian Centinel”, Boston, Massachusetts, November 27, 1793 edition, Vol. XX, Issue 23, page 3.)

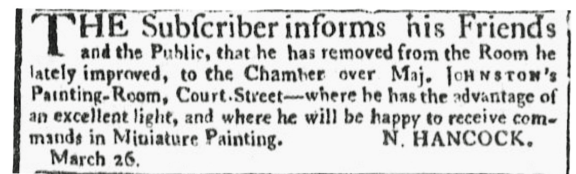


Figure 7:

Four months after he advertised his studio on Tremont Street, Hancock moved to a chamber over the studio of portrait painter Maj. John Johnston, on Court Street.

(“Columbian Centinel”, Boston, Massachusetts, March 26, 1794 edition, Vol. XXI, Issue 5, page 3.)

painter. This is most obvious when comparing the facial features of portraits painted by the two men during this period. To wit, it appears that Hancock adopted some of Johnston's techniques for the painting of mouths, noses and eyes, and the manner in which he incorporated shading as a means of accentuating such facial features. This can be seen, for example, when comparing Hancock's miniature portrait of a Federalist Era American Gentleman (fig. 8) with Johnston's well known portrait of Maj. John Peck (fig. 9).

Further examples of the marked improvement in the quality of Hancock's work during this period can be seen in his portraits of Mrs. Abijah Cheever (Elizabeth Scott)²⁴ and Stephen Salisbury²⁵ – both painted circa 1795, and both holdings of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 8:

**Federalist Era Gentleman
with the Initials "MK"**

by Nathaniel Hancock

circa 1795-1800

*watercolor on ivory; housed under beveled glass in a gold
case with britecut engraving and the monogrammed initials
"MK" engraved to the reverse*

1 1/8 x 1 3/8 inches (sight)

Tormey-Holder Collection



Figure 9:

**Maj. John Peck (ca, 1770-1847),
Boston Merchant**

by John Johnston

circa 1795

oil on canvas

*original measures 25 x 18 7/8 inches
(cropped here for ease of comparison)*

*Andrew W. Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art
museum accession number 1947.17.65*

PERIOD OF TRAVEL

In the winter of 1795-1796, Hancock left the cold of Boston and traveled 570 miles south to Petersburg, Virginia, where he busied himself painting miniature portraits for the season.²⁶ No doubt, his daughter Caroline, who was only four years old at the time, stayed behind in Boston in the care of her Aunt Sarah Welsh. It is not known what specifically brought Hancock to Petersburg or, for that matter, Virginia in general; but one imagines that he was invited to the city by someone he knew well.

Months later, Hancock announced his return to Boston from "the Southward" (the term he used to describe the South), when he published newspaper advertisements in July, 1796, expressing his intention to remain in Boston through the summer.²⁷ (See fig. 10.) Interestingly, these ads also indicate that he returned to the same Tremont Street location where he had rented a studio in November, 1793. (Compare figs 6 and 10.)

It is assumed that, following the summer of 1796, Hancock again left Boston during the winter of 1796-1797, but thus far no evidence has come to light that proves this with certainty. In fact, the next known ads by Hancock did not appear until June, 1797, when he again advertised in Boston and again mentioned his having practiced in "the Southward".²⁸ (See fig. 11.)

It is noteworthy that Hancock's ads of the summer of 1797 were larger and made mention of more products and services than his ads of prior years did. In addition to his usual mention of painting miniature portraits and crafting hair work devices, he also advertised his services in the painting of "flower pieces" (small paintings of flower arrangements) and landscapes. He also made mention of being able to furnish "handsome settings" (locket and pendant frames) in both English and American styles; and he mentioned having prints and drawing books for sale.²⁹

Miniature Painting.
N. HANCOCK,
RESpectfully informs his friends and
 the Public, that he has returned to Botton from the Southward; he proposes continuing here through the summer. His room is in the brick buildings, Tremont-street, **Where he will receive commands in** the line of his profession, and flatters himself he shall be able to give satisfaction to those Ladies and Gentlemen, who may do him the honor to employ him. Hair work, Devices, &c as usual. July 6

Figure 10:

In the summer of 1796, Hancock advertised in Boston his return from "the Southward".

("Columbian Centinel", Boston, Massachusetts, July 6, 1796 edition, Vol. XXV, Issue 35, page 3.)

N. HANCOCK,
MINIATURE PAINTER,
OFFERS his services in the line of
 his profession, to Ladies and Gentlemen, and will engage good Likenesses in Miniature, handsomely painted at reasonable prices—viz, from 10 to 20 Dollars, according to the sizes; and will furnish handsome Settings, either English or American, made at reasonable prices. From the practice he has had in the art here, and at the Southward, flatters himself he shall be able to give satisfaction to those who may honor him with their commands.
Hair work Devices elegantly executed; flower pieces, Landscapes, &c. as patterns.
A few Prints, Drawing Books, &c. for sale.
 His Room is in Tremont-street, opposite the House of PATRICK JEFFREY, Esq. June 17.

Figure 11:

In the summer of 1797, Hancock made mention in his ads of a wide variety of products and services in addition to miniature portrait painting.

("Columbian Centinel", Boston, Massachusetts, June 24, 1797 edition, Volume XXVII, Issue 32, page 4.)

With respect to Hancock's mention of being able to furnish English and American settings, it is again worth noting that no evidence has surfaced to indicate that he himself fabricated the various components used to make such locket or pendant frames. It would appear that he instead used the components made by others (some imported from England) to assemble cases and then further embellished them with the britecut and prick engravings that his miniatures are typically adorned with.

In the winter of 1797-1798, Hancock again traveled south to Virginia; but, rather than going to Petersburg, he instead spent the season painting miniatures in Richmond.³⁰ As in the past, he then returned to Boston the following summer, advertising in July, 1798 his return from "the Southward" and promoting his services painting both miniature portraits and fancy paintings.³¹ That summer, he rented what he described as "an elegant and commodious chamber", located on Milk Street, in the house of a Mr. Wakefield, directly over the shop of a carver and gilder by the name of Mr. Stokes.³² Offering a bit more detail about the settings he made available to patrons, he made specific mention in July, 1798 of having "a collection of very elegant devices for breastpins [i.e., brooches], rings, lockets, &c."³³ (See fig. 12.)

Another year passed before ads by Hancock again appeared in Boston newspapers when, in May and June, 1799, the painter again advertised having a room on Milk Street, above the shop of Mr. Stokes, carver and gilder.³⁴ (See fig. 13) Most interestingly, these ads also offer the first indication that Hancock gave private painting lessons, as he proffered, "Mr. H. would undertake to teach young Ladies and Gentlemen to paint Landscapes, Flowers, Fruit, &c. in water colours – on reasonable Terms."³⁵

Fourteen months later, by then having spent a decade of summers in Boston, Hancock spent the summer of 1800 in Portland, Maine. There, in July and August, he advertised having a room on Free Street, in the home of a Mrs. Davis. Just as he did in Boston a year earlier, he also offered young Portlanders private painting lessons.³⁶

Miniature and Fancy Painting.

THE Subscriber respectfully informs his friends and the public, that he has returned from the Southward, and taken an elegant and commodious chamber in the house of Mr. Wakefield, in Milk-street, directly over the shop of Mr. Stokes, carver and gilder;—where he will be happy to receive commands in the line of his profession, and flatters himself, he shall be able to give satisfaction to those who may please to employ him. He has a collection of very elegant Devices for breastpins, rings, lockets, &c.

N. HANCOCK

Figure 12:

In the summer of 1798, Hancock made mention in his ads of having a variety of elegant devices for breastpins, rings and lockets available for customers.

("Columbian Centinel", Boston, Massachusetts, July 18, 1798 edition, Vol. XXIX, Issue 39, page 4.)

Miniature Painting.

N. HANCOCK,

Respectfully informs his Friends & the Public,

THAT he Paints Portraits in Miniature, at his room over the Shop of Mr. Stokes, Carver and Gilder, next door to Mr. DEARBORN'S Academy, Milk-Street, where he will be happy to receive their commands.

Mr. H. would undertake to teach young Ladies & Gentlemen to paint Landscapes, Flowers, Fruit, &c. in water colours—on reasonable Terms.

Hairwork, Devices, &c. as usual.

Boston, May 13, 1799.

Figure 13:

In May, 1799, Hancock made himself available for private painting lessons, offering to teach young ladies and gentlemen how to paint the likes of landscapes, flowers and fruits in watercolors.

("Independent Chronicle", Boston, Massachusetts, May 20, 1799 edition, Volume XXXI, Issue 1895, page 4.)

Hancock was next seen in Exeter, New Hampshire, in September 1801. Interestingly, he didn't advertise in New Hampshire, but his presence there was recorded in the diary of Rev. Dr. William Bentley (1759-1819; an American Unitarian minister and widely-followed scholar and author of the period) when, on September 14, 1801, he wrote, "I saw at the pubic house Mr. Hancock of Boston who had come to Exeter as a Miniature painter."³⁷ Hancock is also known to have spent time that summer in nearby Portsmouth, New Hampshire.³⁸

Fifteen months later, in December, 1802, Hancock was again advertising in Boston. At that time, he noted his studio as being on State Street, "immediately behind the Hon. Samuel Dexter's office."³⁹ (This Samuel Dexter (1761-1816) was a prominent and well-known Bostonian, having represented Massachusetts in both the U. S. House of Representatives and the U. S. Senate and having served in the presidential cabinets of both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.)

The record of Hancock's activities then goes quiet for a period of two years, until September, 1804, when he again advertised in Portland, Maine. His ads of that season were very small, making simple mention of "likenesses handsomely painted in miniature," at a room he rented on Free Street, in the home of a Capt. John McLellan.⁴⁰

A year later, in the fall of 1805, Hancock next appeared in Salem, Massachusetts. This is evidenced first by another entry in the Rev. Dr. William Bentley's diary, on September 27, in which Bentley wrote the following fascinating narrative:

Mr. Hancock gave me an account of Steward [sic. – Gilbert Stuart], who is now painting portraits for the government in Boston. He is fond of the touches and succeeds with uncommon effect. He [Stuart] tells Mr. H., who is a miniature painter, that our dry air will not dry his paintings, but that he has recourse to hurry his work to the use of water on the floor, to accelerate the effect of heat and to assist him in hastening his work. Mr. Steward is preparing a full length of the three presidents at 600 dollars each.⁴¹

Interestingly, following his meeting with the Rev. Dr. Bentley, newspaper ads by Hancock did not appear in Salem until November 5, 1805, at which time he informed residents of that city of his intention to "practice in the line of miniature painting" there. He noted himself as being reachable at a Mrs. Buffington's on Court Street, where he would be happy to furnish "those who may apply to him with correct and pleasing likenesses handsomely painted."⁴²

A year and a half later, ads by Hancock again appeared in Salem when, from April 18, 1807, the painter expressed gratitude for "the liberal patronage he has met with in this town," and informed patrons of his intention to "remain in Salem a few weeks longer."⁴³ His painting room that spring was located "in the eastern end of the house of Capt. Towne, [on] Chestnut Street, next to the new Assembly house."⁴⁴ (See fig. 14.)

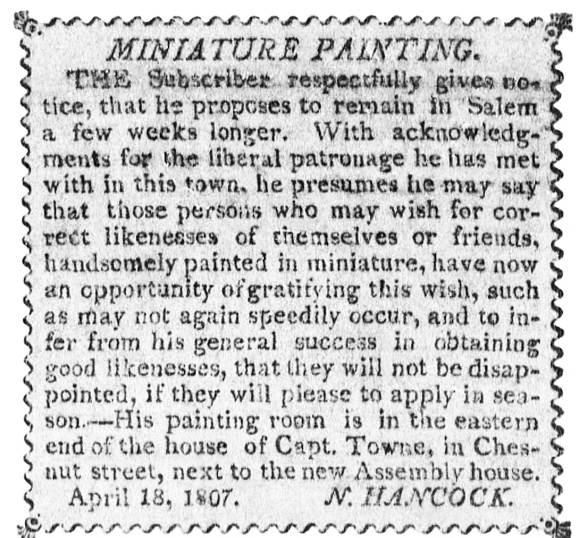


Figure 14:

("The Friend", Salem, Massachusetts, April 18, 1807 edition, Volume I, Issue 16, page 3.)

Yet another year and a half passed before advertisements by Hancock again appeared in Salem when, from November 25, 1808, he expressed his intention to leave Salem permanently, writing, "The subscriber, acknowledging the liberal encouragement he has met with in the line of his profession in Salem, begs leave to inform, that he proposes to leave Salem in all next month."⁴⁵ (See fig. 15.)

Of significance, in his ads of November, 1808, Hancock also mentioned that he would paint "miniatures **or small portraits**" (emphasis added).⁴⁶ Although Hancock had made mention in previous ads that, in addition to miniature portraits, he would paint fancy paintings, flower pieces and landscapes, he never made mention, prior to 1808, of painting small portraits. Interestingly, years later, in 1821, Hancock was listed in a Boston city directory as just a portrait painter (as opposed to miniature painter or miniature portrait painter).⁴⁷ Might he have evolved over time from working in miniature to painting larger portraits?



Figure 15:

Hancock's ads of November, 1808 are significant in that they include mention of the artist painting small portraits in addition to miniatures.

("Salem Gazette", Salem, Massachusetts, November 25, 1808 edition, Volume XXII, Issue 1802, page 3.)

It is assumed that the small portraits Hancock referred to were painted in watercolor on paper, as no evidence has surfaced to indicate that he ever worked in oils. Perhaps this new format was an indication that Hancock's eyesight was beginning to diminish – the painter by then having been 46 years old. Alternatively, Hancock might have been affected by the growing difficulty in obtaining reasonably priced ivory and gold settings from Great Britain during Britain's naval blockades in the years leading up to the War of 1812. In either case, it is assumed that, like his miniatures, Hancock did not sign such small portraits or other fancy/floral paintings; and any surviving works by him on paper are believed to be extremely scarce.

While he may have intended to leave Salem by the end of December, another entry in Rev. William Bentley's diary indicates that Hancock remained in Salem through at least January 8, 1809. On that date, Bentley writes of Hancock being a guest at his home and of the painter reading to those present portions of a letter he had received from his daughter Caroline in Boston. In his account of the evening, Bentley relayed that Caroline, in her letter, had described at great length and in great detail the events of the January 1, 1809 installation of Rev. Samuel Cary as pastor of King's Chapel, a large Unitarian church in Boston.⁴⁸

Several insights can be gleaned from the facts surrounding Caroline's letter to her father. Despite Hancock's frequent and long absences from Boston, for example, one can assume that he maintained a close relationship with his daughter who, at the time of her letter in January, 1809, was two months shy of her seventeenth birthday. It seems clear, too, that the Hancocks (and surely the Welshes as well) were a religious family and devoted adherents to the Unitarian faith. This surely explains Hancock's frequent meetings with the Rev. Dr. Bentley, who was a foremost and highly respected authority on American Unitarianism in his day. In addition to being a religious leader, however, Bentley was also one of the most

widely read intellectuals of his day. Thus, by his association with Bentley, one can assume that Nathaniel Hancock himself was both well-read and well-spoken.

Not long thereafter, upon leaving Salem, Hancock traveled 22 miles due north, to Newburyport, Massachusetts. There, on March 7, 1809, two months after his last meeting in Salem with the Rev. Dr. Bentley, he advertised his services as a miniature painter and announced that he had taken a room at a Mrs. Young's on Green Street.⁴⁹ (See fig. 16.)

This ad of March 7, 1809, which was reprinted several times over a two-week period, was the last of Hancock's known newspaper advertisements. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Hancock's painting career ended abruptly in Newburyport, as he surely continued in the line of an itinerant painter.

Supporting this contention, it should be noted that Exeter, New Hampshire, a town that Hancock is known to have visited and painted in years prior, is just 14 miles northwest of Newburyport; and Portsmouth is just another 13 miles northeast of Exeter. It seems safe to assume that Hancock returned to those towns and perhaps even traveled further north to Portland, Maine. No written records have surfaced, however, to prove this with certainty.

LATER YEARS

Although one can easily assume that Hancock traveled north to at least Exeter after his visit to Newburyport in March of 1809, the fact remains that details of the painter's life after the spring of 1809 remain foggy. Indeed, another twelve years would pass before he was next seen in print when, in 1821, as noted earlier, he appeared in a Boston city directory listed as a portrait painter (no mention of the word miniature), residing at 52 Court Street.⁵⁰

No record of Hancock's life thereafter can be found until his death in 1833, which was announced in newspapers of Boston, Salem and Newburyport. By these death announcements, we learn that Nathaniel Hancock died at the age of 71, on March 25, 1833, at the McLean Asylum for the Insane, located in Charlestown, Massachusetts.⁵¹

Miniature Painting.

THE Subscriber respectfully informs the Ladies and Gentlemen of Newburyport, and its vicinity, that he proposes to reside in this town a short time, and practice in the line of his profession.—He has taken a room at Mrs. Young's in Green-Street, where specimens of his performance may be seen.—From the success and encouragement he has met with in other places where he has practiced, he is led to hope that here he shall give complete satisfaction to those who may honour him with their commands.

N. HANCOCK.

March, 7.

Figure 16:

This ad, published in Newburyport, Massachusetts over a two week period in March, 1809, was the last of Hancock's known newspaper advertisements.

("Newburyport Herald", Newburyport, Massachusetts, March 7, 1809 edition, Volume XII, Issue 96, page 3.)

It is not known how long Hancock was a patient at the McLean Asylum; nor is it known what mental illness or, more likely, what age-related dementia he suffered from. Opened in 1818, the hospital was the first institution in America devoted solely to the treatment of the mentally ill. Its Charlestown location was, at the time, a countryside setting on the outskirts of Boston, and the hospital was known for its spacious grounds and fresh air. One imagines, therefore, that it was a suitable and tranquil place for the aged Hancock to have spent his later days.

In his 2001 work, *Gracefully Insane: Life and Death Inside America's Premier Mental Hospital*, historian Alex Beam notes that the McLean Asylum catered to the most wealthy, aristocratic and artistic of nineteenth century New Englanders.⁵² This is most interesting when one considers that Hancock, although a respected artist of his day, was anything but wealthy, as evidenced by his final disposition. To wit, two days after his death, on March 27, 1833, he was buried in an unmarked grave in Boston's South End Burial Ground, the final resting place for thousands of nineteenth century Bostonians of little or modest means.^{53 54} Of the more than 11,000 people buried in the cemetery, only 20 are identified by grave markers. This leads one to believe that Hancock's financial resources, whatever they may have been at one time, were surely exhausted during his stay at the McLean Asylum.

Given his anonymous end, being buried in an unmarked grave, it is perhaps not a surprise that the record of Nathaniel Hancock's life and career faded into obscurity for as long as it did. It is hoped that the research outlined herein will encourage yet more research by others and that, armed with the knowledge that Hancock painted as late as 1821 (per his listing in the Boston city directory of 1821 as a portrait painter), collectors, curators and art dealers will be on the lookout for later works by the artist that have thus far gone unattributed.

ADDENDUM: A SAMPLING OF MINIATURE PORTRAITS BY NATHANIEL HANCOCK



Federalist Era Gentleman

circa 1785

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York, New York
24.109.95



**Federalist Era Gentleman
(Possibly a Ship's Captain)**

circa 1785-1790

Tormey-Holder Collection
Saint Petersburg, Florida



Federalist Era Gentleman

circa 1790

Tormey-Holder Collection
Saint Petersburg, Florida



**Federalist Era Lady
of the Ridgely Family**

circa 1791

Tormey-Holder Collection
Saint Petersburg, Florida



Self-Portrait of the Artist

circa 1791-1792

Yale University Art Gallery
New Haven, Connecticut
1946.303



**Mrs. Abijah Cheever
(Elizabeth Scott)**

circa 1795

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York, New York
2006.235.318



**Federalist Era Gentleman
with the Initials "MK"**

circa 1795-1800

Tormey-Holder Collection
Saint Petersburg, Florida

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