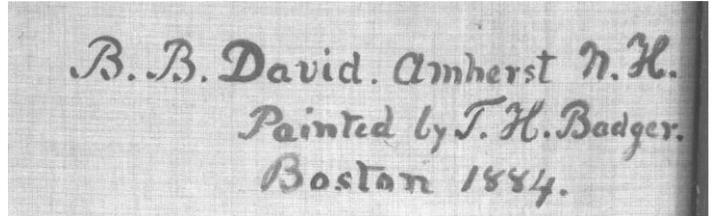


Restoration of Historic Painting of Barnabas B. David by Thomas H. Badger, 1884

by Katrina Holman – December 2014

After 130 years, the large oil portrait of Barnabas Bradt David (1802-1883), painted in 1884 by Boston artist Thomas H. Badger (1820-1897), was dark and dingy and suffered from slight warping, a tiny puncture, and a few missing flecks of pigment. The painting was sent out for conservation in May and returned to the Chapel museum in October 2014. What a remarkable difference professional conservation makes! Now, with the film of dirt gone, the details are so much clearer. The pants, to pick one example, look soft and fuzzy – must have been flannel. The improvements are not merely cosmetic – part of the treatment is designed for overall structural stability in order to preserve the painting for a longer future. And a bonus benefit was the discovery, when the backing was removed, of the inscription, confirming the artist and dating the painting – and thus revealing that it is a posthumous portrait.



Object: Portrait of an elderly bearded man with brown eyes and a serious facial expression, wearing shiny black coat over black vest, both with black buttons, and textured grey trousers, and sitting in a chair; diagonal red drape on right side; two books on left side. Oil painting on canvas, 42 x 34 inches. Inscription on back of canvas at lower right corner, believed to be by the artist (hidden by protective backing): “B. B. David. Amherst N. H. / Painted by T. H. Badger. / Boston 1884.”

Subject of the Portrait: Barnabas B. David (1802-1883) was a prominent figure in the history of the town of Amherst, N.H. He and his partner, Samuel B. Melendy (1799-1877), moved their whip manufacturing business to Amherst, N.H. in 1823, initially to the south part of town near the Melendy homestead, and then in 1831 to Amherst Village. The enterprise lasted five decades and was one of the largest employers in town, providing early employment for women as well as men. The former whip factory of Melendy & David is the house next to Moulton's store at 110 Boston Post Road and the former David family residence is the beautiful brick mansion at 201 Boston Post Road on the corner by the Village's traffic light. B. B. David also served as selectman and town representative to the State legislature, the first president of the Amherst Library Association, and for many years as deacon of the Congregational Church. In 1825, Barnabas married his partner's younger sister, Elizabeth (1802-1892).

As a young man, Barnabas had an “enterprising and hopeful spirit” and was “ambitious” and “sagacious” in business. As an older man, “somewhat above the medium height, erect but spare in figure, there was a mingling of dignity and sweetness in his expression which won your confidence.” He “was averse to strife and controversy” and avoided personal disputes. Although somewhat frail in health, he retained his mental faculties to the end. (He was thus described *in memoriam* by Rev. J. G. Davis (1815-1894) of Amherst, N.H.)



Portrait of Barnabas B. David (1802-1883) of Amherst, N.H., oil painting by Thomas H. Badger (1820-1897), 1884 – after restoration.

Model for the Portrait: The posture of the seated figure with placement of hands and tilt of head, the details of the clothing, and the shape of the chair – all copy a photograph that is also in the collection of the Historical Society of Amherst, hanging on the south wall of the Chapel museum. It is part of a framed composite of photos of 32 early, prominent Amherst men, which was a project of the Amherst Men's Club (in existence 1927-1959), who collected the individual old photos, put together and framed by Mr. Rotch, to be hung in Town Hall. At some later date, it was donated to the Historical Society of Amherst and hung in the Chapel museum (formed 1967).



Donor: A little news item from 1913 sheds light on the provenance of this painting. “The Amherst Library Association has received from Quincy David a portrait in oil executed by Thomas H. Badger of Boston of Deacon Barnabas B. David, the first president of the Library Association, which has been hung on the walls in the Historical Room. This portrait was the property of Col. James B. David just deceased, who desired that at his decease it should be given to the association.” (*Milford (N.H.) Cabinet*, 24 July 1913, page 5. Minutes of the Library Trustees also mention the donation but with less detail.) The donor was James Quincy David (1875-1961; born in Somerville, Mass; buried in Amherst, N.H.), son of James Barnabas David (1833-1913), who was a son of Barnabas B. David. James B. David was a whip manufacturer, working for his father's and uncle's company in Boston while living in Somerville. Having arrived in Amherst in 1913, the portrait of Deacon David must have resided in the Amherst Town Library for more than five decades, being in good company with the Atherton portrait by Gilbert Stuart. (Before the creation of the Historical Society, historic artifacts were regularly donated to the library.) In the Chapel, the B. B. David portrait has been keeping company since 1981 (assuming the HSA's acquisition card is correct) with an oval oil portrait of the first wife of his son James B. David, née Abigail/Abbie Frances Shirley (1845-1895), Quincy's mother, also painted by T. H. Badger.

Painter of the Portrait: Thomas H. Badger (1820-1897) was a life-long professional artist and, for the final decades of his life, was a resident of Boston, Massachusetts, but he also had a special connection to Amherst, N.H. His mother, née Rebecca Melendy (1795-1852), was a native of Amherst and sister-in-law of B. B. David and sister of his partner Samuel Badger Melendy. Thomas H. Badger's father, Thomas Badger (1793-1868) “of Boston,” was a significant New England portrait painter, whose work can be found in the Currier museum of Manchester, N.H.; the Historical Society of N.H. in Concord; and Maine Historical Society. The Thomas Badger family actually resided in Amherst, N.H. for a few years (1830-1834) in the Cricket Corner district near the Melendy homestead. Subsequently, the young Davids in the Boston area remained close with their Badger relatives. The 1855 census of Cambridge, Mass. found Thomas H. Badger, 36, artist, & wife sharing their home with Samuel David, 26, whipmaker. The 1857 directory of Cambridge confirms that Samuel M. David, whip dealer at 8 Dock Square in Boston, boarded at North Avenue corner Everett, the home of Thomas H. Badger, artist. This was Samuel Melendy David (1829-1869), a son of Barnabas. Thomas Badger, the father, died at the house of S. M. David in Cambridge. It's no wonder then that when James B. David wanted a portrait of his recently deceased father, he commissioned it from his cousin.

Conservation: The painting conservator was Martha Cox of Shapleigh, Maine (greatworksrestoration.com), who is involved in an ongoing project to conserve historic paintings of the State House in Concord. Her treatment report for the portrait of B. B. David explains: “The top layer of varnish was removed with xylene. The underlying oxidized dirt layer and possible older surface coating was removed with a detergent and solvent solution. Various stains and drips were lifted from the surface during this cleaning. The [tiny] amber colored globules or accretions stuck to the surface in the background left were not soluble; attempts to remove them mechanically only served to lift the paint layer and therefore they were left as is.” (They are hardly visible.)

After removal from the stretcher and cleaning the reverse side of debris, “the painting was placed in the press and slowly relaxed and flattened to correct the buckling and the minor planar distortions. The tacking edges were reinforced with a strip lining of polyester monofilament scrim adhered with ethylene vinyl acetate. ... The puncture to the canvas in the background left was patched with the same materials as the strip lining.”

“An isolating varnish layer of Acryloid B-72 in 12% solution with toluene was applied. The paint loss at the puncture was filled with acrylic gesso and inpainted with gouache. A second varnish layer of Soluvar (60:40 gloss:matte) in 25% mineral spirits was applied to tone down and even out the surface sheen. The filled area and scattered minor discolorations and light bits were inpainted with conservation pigments in ketonic resin. A protective backing board was attached to the stretcher.”

Restoration Cost: The \$2365 cost was funded by Nipmugs, an Amherst chapter of The Questers, a non-profit organization, thanks to a preservation & restoration grant of \$1700 from The Questers International board of directors combined with proceeds from the sale of Historic Amherst suncatchers, a series of annual collectibles. The Nipmugs chapter was founded in 1976 and currently has 24 members.

A Word from the Curator: “It’s so important to preserve the items in our collection for future generations,” said Susan Fischer, Director of Museums for the Historical Society of Amherst. “Martha did a magnificent job restoring the Barnabas David painting. It looks so vibrant – just like it must have 130 years ago.”



(From left to right) Martha Cox of Maine, painting conservator; Katrina Holman, president of Nipmugs Questers of Amherst; and Susan Fischer, director of museums for the Historical Society of Amherst, N.H. – holding the historic portrait of Barnabas B. David on the day of its return to the Chapel museum after restoration, 21 October 2014.

SELECTED SOURCES & NOTES:

Biographical Sketch: “Barnabas Bradt David” by Rev. J. G. Davis, *The Granite Monthly: A New Hampshire Magazine*, 1885, volume 8, pages 131-136 (online Books.Google.com). One can read in wonderful detail about how Barnabas, motherless from the age of 6, was bounced around from family to family during his childhood; his whip business, successes and reverses; his unusual shared financial arrangement with his business partner and brother-in-law; his service to the local church as deacon and to the town; his politics; and his stellar character. Recommended reading for those interested in Amherst history.

Amherst Library Association: Was formed in 1859. The “librarian” announced in the 18 May 1859 issue of the *Farmers' Cabinet* that “books will be ready for delivery at the store of Mssrs. Hapgood & Abbot.” A newspaper notice in Dec. 1859 notified members that the annual meeting of the Amherst Library Association would be held “at the home of B. B. David, Esq.” on 4 January at 7:30 pm “for the choice of officers.” In Feb. 1860, they advertised: “Condition of membership is signing the constitution and paying the Treasury the sum of fifty cents in advance.”

Framed Composite of 32 Amherst Men; Amherst Men's Club: The old label in the museum says: “This group of pictures of former Amherst men was made up by Mr. Rotch and presented to the Amherst Men's Club who later donated it to the Amherst Historical Society.” More specifics can be found in *Amherst, New Hampshire 1881-1982: A Sleeping Town Awakens* by The Historical Society of Amherst, 1983, pages 143-144, 188.

Badger Family as Residents of Amherst: Thomas Badger appears in the 1830 census of Amherst, N.H., in which heads of household are listed geographically, so by knowing where others lived, one can deduce that the Badger family was in the Cricket Corner area of the south part of town: ... Sewell Fletcher [376 Boston Post Road]; Levi Adams [369 BPR]; Robert Bouton; Thomas Badger; Timothy Nichols; Samuel Melendy; George Gardner [probably Cricket Corner Road]; Samuel Wilkins; William Melendy [328 BPR]; Mavoruk Smith [324 BPR]; ... In Amherst tax invoices for the southern section from April 1831 through 1834, Thomas Badger is a taxpayer and is assessed the poll tax, which is the evidence that he was a resident. In the 1834 Amherst tax invoice, Thomas Badger was assessed taxes based on invoice of: 1 poll; real estate valued \$250; 1 horse valued \$70; 1 cow valued \$18; and 1 pleasure carriage \$50. (Amherst, N.H. Tax Invoice 1820-1832 & Amherst, N.H. Tax Invoice “1833-1855” = 1833-1842 residents & nonresidents plus 1843-1855 nonresidents, hand-written bound oversize volumes written by town clerks, stored in Town Hall vault.) The following advertisement ran in the *Farmers' Cabinet* of Amherst, N.H.: “To Let, the Badger House & Tenement, near the School House, between the Fletcher Tavern and William Melendy's. Apply to said Melendy or C. H. Atherton. Amherst, April 18, 1839.” (The Fletcher tavern was/is at 382 Boston Post Road and Wm Melendy's was/is at 328 BPR; the pertinent school house was the Cricket Corner School, on Boston Post Road just north of Cricket Corner Cemetery.) Thomas Badger owned the place until his death and continued to be taxed on a small house lot but as a non-resident. On 9 June 1868 (by Hillsborough County deed 379:327), Thomas H. Badger & William M. Badger of Boston, Massachusetts, sold to Samuel Wilkins of Amherst, for \$100, 2 tracts in Amherst, N.H., with buildings near the School House in District No. 3: The first tract lying east of the road leading from Amherst to Boston, containing 1/8 (one eighth) acre on easterly side of road, bounded – beginning at southeast corner, opposite the **house**, thence northerly by road abt 10 rods; easterly 2 rods; southerly by land of Levi Adams abt 10 rods; westerly 2 rods to beginning. The other piece lying on westerly side of road, containing about half an acre, bounded – southerly by land of Joseph Fletcher abt 20 rods by Fletcher's land; easterly abt 8 rods to road; northerly abt 20 rods to beginning. Was same land deeded to Thomas Badger by William Melendy on 31 Jan. 1831, recorded 165:430.

Artist's Studio in Amherst: In the 19th century, portrait artists were quite often itinerant – but didn't advertise much, judging by Newsbank's database of historic newspapers. In once instance, in 1850, “T. H. Badger” advertised in the Amherst newspaper that he had taken the room formerly occupied by Mrs. Benden [in the building later known as the Corner Store at intersection of Middle & Main Streets in Amherst Village] where

he offered “Daguerreotype Miniatures. Taken without regard to weather, at various prices, from \$1.00 upwards. Particular attention given to taking Likenesses of LITTLE CHILDREN.” (*Farmers' Cabinet*, 14 March 1850, p. [3].) There was no Badger taxed as resident of Amherst in 1850 nor 1851, so he was just in town temporarily. The 1852 Boston Directory contains this entry: “Badger T. H. portrait and landscape painter, 12 West, rm. 18.”

Death Notice of Thomas Badger, the Father: “Died in Cambridge, Mass., on the evening of the 3d inst., at the house of S. M. David, suddenly of lung fever, Thomas Badger, Artist of Boston, aged about 70. He had been a resident in this town [Amherst, N.H.] temporarily, for some years.” (*Farmers' Cabinet*, 6 Feb 1868.) According to the vital record, Thomas Badger, aged 75, a widowed portrait painter who was a resident of Boston, died in Cambridge on 3 Feb. 1868. (Death record online at FamilySearch .org.)

Documentation of Conservation: Final treatment report 14104 by Martha Cox of Shapleigh, Maine, dated 17 October 2014. The conservator provided HSA with a CD of multiple before and after digital photographs. A photograph showing the piece half cleaned with an uneven line between dingy untreated area and brightened cleaned area, running right down the middle of the face, is particularly striking – but it would not show to good effect in this medium (i.e., greyscale required by newsletter). A photograph of the hidden inscription with artist's name and date has been affixed to the backing.

Photo Credits: The image of the restored oil painting was taken by Martha Cox and is property of the Historical Society of Amherst. The photo of conservator Martha Cox at work in her studio “inpainting” the B. B. David portrait appears courtesy of GreatWorks Painting Restoration of Maine. The new photo, courtesy of Susan Fischer, of the old photo of B. B. David had to be taken through the frame glass so is not as sharp as the original, which is in the bottom row of the framed composite of Amherst men. The photo of the interior of the Chapel museum shows the B. B. David portrait *in situ* in 2013, prior to restoration, and curators Bonnie Knott (back to camera), Susan Fischer and Chris Marshall preparing to open museum to the public; courtesy of Rand Peck. Thanks go to Jackie Marshall for snapping the picture of Martha, Katrina and Susan, all smiles in the Chapel museum with the newly restored and reframed historic portrait.



Before restoration, B. B. David portrait casts darkness on the Chapel.Museum