

The Bingham Portrait Project: The Missing Portraits of George Caleb Bingham

By Patsy Moss

Art has the ability to depict aspects of regional Kansas City history in a manner that individual manuscript and archival collections cannot. With this concept in mind, consider that George Caleb Bingham painted nearly 350 portraits. Of those, more than 100 were portraits of the people who created greater Kansas City. Over the course of the past year, I could only locate 33 of



The first copy of "Martial Law" hung in the hall of the Mercer Home at 116 South Pleasant Street in Independence. At one time it was on deposit at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. It is now in the collection of the Cincinnati Art Museum.

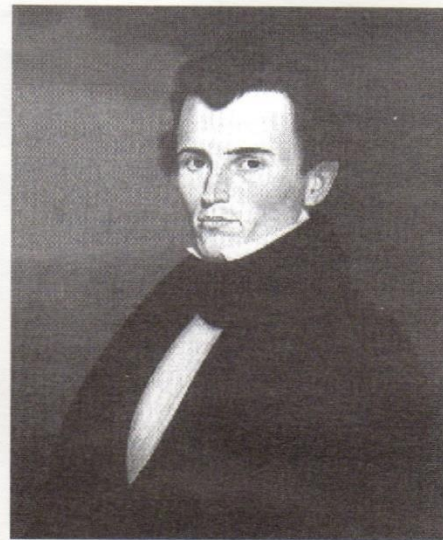


Bingham's "Martial Law," or "Order No. 11." The first copy painted between 1865 and 1868 was on canvas, and was appraised in the artist's estate in 1879 at \$250; a second copy painted on a linen tablecloth is located today at the State Historical Society of Missouri in Columbia.

these portraits in our locale. Twenty-three of these portraits had reproductions available for reprinting.

In 1964, when Maurice A. Bloch documented Bingham's work in the *Catalog Raisonné*, he found all but a handful of the hundred portraits. In less than 40 years, over half have "disappeared." One has officially been lost. Ownership of the other portraits is unknown. Do you know the location of any George Caleb Bingham portraits?

When I learned how many portraits have been lost in the forty years since Maurice Bloch published his *Catalog Raisonné*, I was incredulous. When I later learned how many of the existing portraits did not have an existing reproduction, incredulity verged on disbelief. But, the fact is, the losses and lack of records worsens with each passing year. The obvious solution is to find the missing portraits, restore, reproduce, and catalog the found and existing Bingham portraits.



Judge Thomas Minor Chevis, painted by Bingham in 1835. Jackson County Historical Society is in possession of this portrait.

The idea meets fertile ground every time I express it. A Bingham Portrait Project is beginning. The project proposes to work collaboratively across Greater Kansas City that transcends city, county and state lines to illustrate the unifying history of the area through the portraits of our first artist.

The first step is to find the missing portraits. Then, steps may be undertaken to restore those needing conservation. High quality reproductions of the originals should be made so that an updated catalog may be formulated that may also include biographical sketches of Bingham's subjects. Reproductions of existing and located portraits may also be exhibited at poignant historic sites; perhaps locations where the subjects of Bingham's portraits lived and worked. And, who knows, perhaps a simultaneous virtual exhibit of the images and biographies may be presented on the World Wide Web? The possibilities are endless.

The Jackson County Historical Society JOURNAL is taking the lead

to help introduce this effort to the historical community. Other institutions are beginning to support the Bingham Portrait Project.

If you know the location of any of the portraits listed below, or others that should be listed, please contact Patsy Moss at 913.488.5698.

Allen, Col. Shubael
 Allen, Miss Annie
 Allen, Mrs. Shubael
 (Diana Ayres Trigg)
 Atchison, David Rice
 Bingham, Henry Vest, Jr.
 Bingham, James Rollins
 Bingham, Mrs. George (Eliza K. Thomas)
 Bingham, Mrs. George Caleb (Sarah Elizabeth Hutchinson)
 Campbell, John
 Campbell, John S.
 Campbell, William
 Drenon, Julia Eveline
 Ewing, Henry Watkins
 Hall, Col. Jacob
 Hall, Miss Mary Frances
 Hall, Mrs. Jacob (Mary Louisa Colcord)
 Hardeman, John Locke
 Henry, Judge John W.
 Henry, Mrs. John W. (Maria Williams)
 Hughes, Mr. (of Platte (probably General Bela M. Hughes of Plattsburg, Mo.)
 Jackson, Claiborne Fox
 Johnston, Captain William
 Johnston, Mrs. William (Rachael Spears)
 Kinney, Capt. Joseph
 Kinney, Mrs. Joseph (Matilda Clarke)
 Koontz, Mrs. George
 (Laura Ellen Ware Neill)
 Lusk, Miss Mary Belle
 Mastin, John Jerome, Jr.
 Mastin, Thomas Hoyle
 McCarty, Col. Edward Cresap
 McCarty, Mrs. Col. Edward Cresap
 (Mary Elizabeth Brown)
 McGee, Fry P.
 McGee, Mrs. James H.
 (Eleanor Evelyn Fry)

Moore, Mrs. Thomas (Sallie Thomas)
 Moss, Col. Oliver Perry
 O'Bryan, Jordan
 Piper, Mr. James M.
 Piper, Mrs. James M. (Mary Thomas)
 Pitts, Mrs. Younger II
 (Elizabeth Rogers)
 Pitts, Mrs. Younger III
 (Eleanor Hawkins)
 Pitts, Younger II
 Ritchey, Samuel
 Rollins, Major James Sidney
 Rollins, Miss Sally Rodes
 Rollins, Mrs. James Sidney (Mary Elizabeth Hickman)
 Sappington, Mrs. William Breathitt
 (Mary Mildred Breathitt)
 Sappington, William Breathitt
 Sawyer, Judge Samuel Locke
 Swinney, Captain William Daniel
 Swinney, Mrs. William Danie
 (Lucy Ann Jones)
 Thomas, Dr. James Bennett
 Thomas, Dr. William P.
 Ward, Hugh Campbell
 Woodson, Judge Warren
 Woodson, Mrs. Samuel Hughes
 (Ann Randolph Meade)

More information is available at the Jackson County Historical Society's website: www.jchs.org.

Patsy Moss, a native of the Kansas City region, is a freelance historical writer. She is the author of "Prelude to the Shawnee Methodist Mission: Family Connections of Sarah Johnson with the Shawnee Prophet," (Kawsmouth: A Journal of Regional History, Vol. 2, No. 1, Autumn 1999), and "The Portraits of George Caleb Bingham Reveal a Different History of Greater Kansas City," (Kawsmouth: A Journal of Regional History, Special Issue: History of the Arts in Kansas City, Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter-Spring 2001). Watch for more information in this JOURNAL, on the Society's website, and around the greater Kansas City region as The Bingham Project develops.