William King, First Governor of Maine: His Known Portraits and Their Stories

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Reflections from the Curator’s Desk

WILLIAM KING,
FIRST GOVERNOR OF MAINE:
HIS KNOWN PORTRAITS AND
THEIR STORIES

BY DEANNA BONNER-GANTER

This article studies the known studio portraits of William King (1768-1852), first governor of Maine, finding that the leader’s personal life and professional travels led to sittings with such noted master painters as Gilbert Stuart, Edward Greene Malbone, and Chester Harding. These living portraits reflect period styles, while later likenesses require a broad understanding of formal state portraiture and its historical elements. One portrait, having resurfaced recently, was found to have hung in the Hall of Flags in the State Capitol for almost thirty years; others required considerable research to determine their provenance. The Honorable James G. Blaine played an unexpected role in this history of King’s likenesses, while the author traces other portrait provenances through museum, probate, church, and vital records; deeds; family and town histories; and the papers of notable politicians like Rufus King of New York. The William King letters at MHS provide insight into family relations helpful in tracking down ownership trajectories. Deanna S. Bonner-Ganter earned an M.S. in Archives Management at Simmons College; an M.A. in Printmaking at Rutgers University; and a B.F.A. in Art Education at the College of Visual Arts, Boston University. She is Curator of Photography, Art, and Archives at the Maine State Museum.

Overview

THERE ARE five known life portraits of William King for which there is no doubt of the subject’s identity and the painting’s provenance. These works, for which William King personally posed, represent a sixty-year period of his life. There is a sixth studio

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portrait of a young man attributed to be a likeness of William King owned by the Scarborough Historical Society and displayed in the William King Lodge #219, Scarborough, Maine. Because of the portrait’s uncertain origin and because it has not been thoroughly studied, the identity of the subject remains unclear. This portrait is discussed in the appendix.

In each of these portrait sittings, the artist captured striking features of his subject that were later described in letters and published remembrances: a dark heavy brow, deep strong eyes, and an erect posture that reflected King’s tall, athletic physique. The earliest portrait, a miniature, mirrors the fledgling period of King’s notable career; the latest takes the viewer to a studio photograph made sometime in the years close to his death in 1852.

The five likenesses represent private and personal portraits completed during William King’s lifetime. Lastly, there were two artists’ interpretations made of this accomplished leader commissioned many years after his passing, intended for permanent public display in the state of Maine and the nation’s capitol. These works characterize formal “state portraiture,” in which pose and gesture and the composition’s setting symbolize qualities such as majesty and leadership.1 Portraits derived from two of the five likenesses are briefly noted because they are not only faithful to their sources, but because they belong to important Maine institutions: the Maine State Archives, the Portland Public Library, and the Patten Free Library, in the city of Bath.

A Glimpse into Early American Portraiture

Before the introduction of the daguerreotype in 1839, individual likenesses had been preserved as sculpted forms, paintings, engravings, and silhouettes. Two dimensional works, often handsomely framed, were sought as keepsakes and memoirs of a person, a family, and occasionally as an emblem of a timely event in one’s life. Portraits in oil on canvas or wood panel remained affordable only for wealthy or notable American families of means and for successful entrepreneurs, businessmen, politicians, and elected leaders. Portrait-makers, in turn, perhaps with thought to their own legacy, left self-portraits or had their likenesses painted from life by a talented contemporary or friend. Early nineteenth-century American painters such as John Trumbull, John Singleton Copley, Charles Willson Peale, and Gilbert Stuart created remarkable careers for themselves painting what are considered landmark por-
traits of America’s outstanding leaders, as well as canvases of private individuals and their families.\textsuperscript{2}

William King with his young wife Ann, a few years after their marriage, joined the status of “the intimate society of all who were distinguished by office, rank and attainment” as sitters in the Boston studio of America’s eminent portraitist Gilbert Stuart.\textsuperscript{3}

\textbf{Life’s Passages: William King and his Family}

William King was born at Dunstan Landing in 1768, in present-day Scarborough, Maine, when it was still a part of Massachusetts. He entered Phillips Academy, Andover, in 1781 at the age of thirteen. Though he only attended one term, he was to be remembered as one of the academy’s notable alumni. Young William worked briefly in a sawmill, but responding to his self-reliant spirit, left home and as the story goes, drove a yoke of two steer to Bath and then on to Topsham. Starting in a partnership with his brother-in-law, King soon acquired ownership of a sawmill,\textsuperscript{4} and quickly moved on to become highly successful as a real estate-investor, ship builder, and shipping tycoon. He established and became director and president of Bath Bank, the city’s first bank. Massachusetts named King major general of the Maine militia district at the outbreak of the War of 1812. He clearly appreciated this title, preferring to be addressed as “General” throughout his life.

King was elected to the Massachusetts General Court in 1800 where he served three terms. He became president of the convention that framed Maine’s State Constitution in 1820 and oversaw the plans for construction of the State House in Augusta, consulting with Charles Bulfinch, Boston’s famed architect of public buildings.\textsuperscript{5} Politically popular in the new state of Maine, William King was overwhelmingly elected the state’s first governor on June 2, 1820, and remained in office until May 28, 1821.

On October 1, 1800, at the age of thirty-two, King married nineteen-year-old Ann Nesbeth Frazier (1782-1857) of Boston. They had met through his shipping dealings with her brother, John Frazier, a Boston charter merchant. William and Ann had two children: a daughter Mary Elizabeth (1817-1847) and a son Cyrus William (1816-1881). Mary Elizabeth was subject to convulsions that began in her teenage years. She died unmarried at age thirty. Cyrus William was artistic, independent, and not easy to manage. Sent to the School for Moral Discipline in South Boston, the unhappy youth pleaded in letters to his father for a change and some-
times for money. His father refused to have him transferred, and Cyrus eventually became a teaching assistant in the school. He moved back to Maine to live with his mother soon after his sister died in 1847 and his father’s mental state began to wane. Five years after William King’s passing in 1852, Ann moved to Portland to live with her son.⁶

Cyrus married Sarah Oakman Jameson, daughter of Captain James and Sarah (Randall) Jameson of Brunswick, on October 19, 1853, the year following his father’s death. He matriculated at the Bowdoin College Medical School, class of 1859, but did not complete the requirements. Cyrus and Sarah had two children. A son William was born July 18, 1856 and graduated from Bowdoin College in 1881 to become a physician in Brunswick. William became seriously ill after about fifteen years of practice, spent the last five years of his life in the mental hospital in Augusta, and died unmarried at age fifty-four. Cyrus and Sarah’s daughter, Ann Nesbeth Frazier, given the full name of her grandmother, was born January 31, 1860. Ann, following her father’s artistic talents, later advertised as a portrait artist. She married Victor Minor (Minon? or Minot?), a Frenchman and head floor walker in a large Parisian department store. She worked as a portrait artist in Paris, died at age forty-eight, and was buried in France.⁷

**A Portrait Pair of Social Distinction**

The most familiar and frequently published portraits of William King and his wife Ann were painted by the prominent portrait painter, Gilbert Stuart (1755-1828). The renowned artist had moved from Washington, D.C. to Philadelphia and then to Boston, establishing a studio on Summer Street in 1805. Stuart probably painted the portrait pair in early 1806 about the same time he painted a portrait of Major General Henry Knox of Thomaston. The King portraits, both oil on canvas and unsigned, were shipped to Bath in April 1806.⁸

It is possible the Stuart portraits, if not personally commissioned by William, were gifts from Rufus King, (1755-1827), his older half-brother, or perhaps it was Rufus’s suggestion to have the portraits made by the American master. Rufus, who was Minister plenipotentiary at the Court of St. James in London, wrote in 1802 to William: “With compliments to your wife, although you did not inform me of it I have learned you are married to an amiable woman. I have resigned and ask to return home next spring.” Rufus King had established connections with Gilbert Stuart nine years earlier in 1797, when, at the Court of St. James, he had
“delivered Stuart’s full-length portrait of George Washington, the gift of Senator Bingham, to the marquis of Lansdowne” in London.9

The Stuart portraits probably hung in an honored location in the King family mansion in Bath for many years and stayed with Ann Frazier King as she left Bath and moved on after her husband passed away. Ann died in 1857, just five years after her husband. If the Stuart portraits indeed stayed with her, they most likely remained in her son Cyrus’s home for another twenty-four years. Cyrus died in 1881. Ann’s only granddaughter had married and moved to France after 1893. At this time, William King, the grandson and physician in Brunswick, remained the only direct heir in Maine.

Almost half a century later, the portraits of William and Ann were received by the State of Maine, on July 18, 1951. The Governor and Legislative Council approved the bequest of the paintings from Mr. William King Richardson Esq., great-grand nephew of Governor William King, who died in Boston in January of that year.

Richardson’s will provided that “Inasmuch as Governor King was the first governor of Maine, I desire the portraits of the governor and Mrs. King by Stuart should be given to the State of Maine and preferably hung in the Capitol of that State.” Laurence Curtis, nephew of William King Richardson, and Albert W. Lyon, co-executors of the will, presented the portraits to Governor Frederick Payne.10

According to Curtis, the portraits previously hung in the late Mr. Richardson’s dining room at 306 Beacon Street, Boston. Richardson purchased them “sometime before 1926” from the estate of Governor William King’s grandson, the only remaining direct descendant. Since the 1950s, these valued portraits have, except for one or two brief periods, hung in the governor’s office as they do today.11

Similar Likenesses

An oil on canvas copy of Stuart’s William King portrait was painted in the immediate years after King’s death in 1852 by Bath portrait painter Philip Spooner Harris (1824-1884). Somewhat smaller than the original, this work hangs in the Reading Room of the Patten Free Library in Bath. Harris established his portrait studio within the Eliot Block, Bath, between 1850 and 1864. It seems likely that the initial Harris portrait was a direct copy from which he made other canvases to sell, according to his wife’s correspondence in the Maine State Library. The Portland Public Library also owns a copy of the Stuart original, painted
Portrait of William King, first Governor of Maine, 1806. One of a portrait pair painted from life (the companion piece is of his wife, Ann Nesbeth Frazier King) in early 1806 during the period artist Gilbert Stuart had set up his studio on Summer Street, Boston. The portraits were shipped to Bath in April, 1806.

Oil on Canvas 29" x 23 ½". State House Portrait Collection, Maine State Museum, Augusta. Gift of William King Richardson, 1951.
Portraiture of William King

Portrait of Ann Nesbeth Frazier King, 1806. Companion portrait to that of her husband, William King, first Governor of Maine. Painted by Gilbert Stuart in Boston in early 1806 and shipped to the King mansion in Bath, April of that year.

**GILBERT STUART, American (1755-1828). Circa 1806.**

Oil on Canvas 29" x 23 ½". State House Portrait Collection, Maine State Museum, Augusta. Gift of William King Richardson, 1951.
by John Bradley Hudson Jr. (1832-1903). Hudson, a native of Portland, sold his King canvas to the library in 1882 for fifteen dollars. The Hudson portrait was probably painted from the Harris work or a late nineteenth-century photo reproduction of the original.12

A Treasure and a Gift

William King was about age twenty-nine when he sat for itinerant artist Edward Greene Malbone (1777-1807). Malbone, today recognized as one of America’s finest miniature painters, had a very short but prolific career during which he produced over seven hundred portraits. Self-taught, Malbone became a portrait painter in 1794. This same year he traveled from his native Providence to Boston, where King probably connected with the artist. Later he continued to New York and on to Philadelphia in 1800. While working in Boston, Malbone placed the following advertisement in the local newspaper: “Malbone, Edward G., Miniature Painting and Hair Work. From Newport, takes this method to inform the Public that he intends to practice the above during his stay in this town.” King made regular trips to Boston during this period as he represented the town of Topsham in the General Court of Massachusetts and had dealings with John Frazier.13

Characteristic of Malbone’s miniature presentations, the 2” x 2 1/4” intricate watercolor on ivory was set in a plain but elegant oval pendant intended to be worn with a ribbon around the neck. King wears a powdered coif in this view according to the social protocol of the era, a custom that continued into the early 1800s, “when gentlemen will not be in full dress without powder and shoe buckles.” His shirt is white with a white wrap-around cravat under a dark blue frock coat. A cliff with tree branches cast against a background blue sky complements the head and shoulders view, an attribute Malbone used in another portrait miniature and also in the composition of a landscape painting. His style of parallel fine brush strokes is clear under the magnifying glass. On the verso of the pendant is a plaited lock of hair set behind glass. A band of deep blue translucent cobalt glass and a band of gold surround the hair work.14

The portrait miniature has a detailed provenance, having passed through the family beginning with Ann Nesbeth Frazier, William King’s wife. The miniature’s movement through the family to the most recent owner, James Gore King VI, is traced through the family tree illustrated here.15

Ann gave the miniature portrait to her niece and adopted daughter
Portraiture of William King, ca. 1797. King sat for this miniature when he was about twenty-nine years old. During this period he represented the town of Topsham in the General Court at Boston. Well dressed in a brass-buttoned waistcoat, he wears a powdered coif that sets off the dramatic dark eyebrows for which he was often recalled.

EDWARD GREEN MALBONE, American (1777-1807). Circa 1797.
Watercolor on ivory set into a gold pendant. 2” x 2 1/4”.
Gift of James Gore King VI to the Maine State Museum, Augusta.

Malbone’s miniature watercolor on ivory was set in a plain but elegant oval pendant intended to be worn with a ribbon around the neck.
of William King, Ann Frazier (Mrs. Edmund T. Bridge) of Bath. Ann Frazier Bridge gave the piece to her daughter, Hannah North Bridge of Augusta. Edward King (grandson of Rufus King, William’s older half-brother) purchased the miniature from Hannah North Bridge and gave it to his son James Gore King IV. The piece was handed down to James Gore King V, New York City. He gave the pendant to Margaret Hale (Mrs. John Hale Thomas), New Haven, who was granddaughter of the eldest daughter, Mary Caroline (1799-1867) (i.e. Mrs. Benjamin Hale), of Cyrus King, brother of the subject, deceased 1817. More recently, the miniature was returned to James Gore King V who gave it to his son, James Gore King VI, born in 1927, of Juneau, Alaska.

Knowledge of this circa 1797 miniature resulted as part of the New York City Frick Art Museum and Reference Library’s nineteenth-century survey of New England portraiture. This valued miniature likeness of William King was recently given to the people of Maine by James Gore King VI and formally received by the Maine State Museum in November 2006, during Mr. King’s trip to Maine.16

Portrait by a Self-taught Artist

It was during artist Joseph Titcomb Harris’s active period in the city of Portland that William King sat for the newly acclaimed portrait painter. Harris maintained a portrait studio in Portland from 1828 to 1836 and the oil-on-wood panel is signed and dated 1830 on the verso. Acquired by the Maine State Museum in spring 2006, the work at the time was held by the Colby College Museum of Art. Former Maine Supreme Court Justice Harold C. Marden Esq., of Waterville, deceased 1994, had loaned the portrait to Colby College in the 1980s, and it hung in the Trustees Lounge. Robert A. Marden, oldest son of the donor, offered the portrait to the state. Although it is not clear how Harold Marden acquired the work, documents suggest that Harris’s portraits appeared on the Portland market in the late 1970s.17

Harris portrayed King as a much younger man than his actual age of sixty-two in 1830. His interpretation of King’s dark hair, sideburns, and dark eyes set under dark brows have a fleeting resemblance to the Stuart portrait, made thirty years earlier. Harris seemed to rely on a formula for gentleman’s hair design, as this look appears quite similar to that of other male portraits he painted about the same time. In the King portrait, Harris worked in a limited palette of tones and contrast, also ap-
Portrait of William King, ca. 1830. Recent to a career as a portrait painter, Joseph T. Harris signed and dated his likeness of William King. King was a customs collector in Bath at the time of this portrait, made in Harris’s studio on Middle Street, Portland.

JOSEPH TITCOMB HARRIS (active 1830s) Portland, Maine. Circa 1830. Oil on wood panel 23 5/8” x 30 1/4”. Collection Maine State Museum, Augusta.
parent in the portrait’s background drapery, a style reminiscent of the simple linear vision characteristic of folk painters.

The artist maintained a studio on Middle Street from 1830 to 1834 where he had gained local recognition. The September 30, 1830 *Daily Courier* noted of Mr. J.T. Harris, “it has been but a year or two since he commenced his career, yet we think some of his portraits would do no discredit to the pencils of veteran and celebrated artists. Fine likenesses of some of our respected citizens may be seen at his rooms a few doors above the Portland Bank.” The Portland *Eastern Argus* of July 17, 1829 describes the studio as “two rooms west of the Portland Bank, over the G.C. Lyford store.” The portrait’s ties to Colby College make clear historical sense. King sponsored establishment of the Maine Literary and Theological Institution for Baptists in Waterville in 1818. The Institute became Waterville College in 1821 and Colby University in 1867. For twenty-nine years until 1848, William King was a trustee, taking great personal interest in the development of the institution.

A Portrait Resurfaces from the Past

A significant event occurred in 2001, when an apparently forgotten nineteenth century oil-on-canvas portrait of William King appeared at the Maine State Museum doors, brought in by its owner, Peter Carlton French (1940-2004) of New Portland, Maine. It was left as a loan for identification and research. No one anticipated the saga that was about to unfold.

The work portrays the torso of a handsome, middle-aged man with white hair and dark prominent eyebrows. The subject, William King, appears to be seated in a “directed pose” holding a book marked by his finger, a gesture not uncommon in early American portraiture. Personal attributes such as the clearly defined oval pin studded with gems seen attached to the upper bodice of King’s shirt was later described as a “wedding gift” from his wife Ann. Brush strokes faintly suggest an engraved coat of arms on the ring King wore on his right pinky finger; King’s ring had been noted in letters. Historian Leonard Bond Chapman concluded the crest was “a work of fancy, rather than one of hereditary merit.” Rufus’s letters held a similar sealing wax impression, such as that found on an 1802 letter he sent to his younger half-brother William. Rufus’s coat of arms wax seal featured “a simple shield with a figure of a rampant lion, but without a motto or other embellishments.” A wax
Portraiture of William King

Portrait of William King, ca. 1834. This oil-on-canvas, painted from life, hung in the Hall of Flags for over thirty years, until it was claimed by descendants of the original owner in 1892. The likeness of King in his mid-sixties became a model for copies intended for illustration and photo-reproduction.

ARTIST UNKNOWN. Circa 1834. Oil on Canvas 23 5/8" x 30 1/4". Estate of Peter Carlton French, New Portland, Maine.
A stamp on an 1817 letter from James Gore King to his Uncle William bore a crest “like the one used by William King” (engraved on his ring).²⁰

An intriguing clue concerning this painting’s origin appeared with a photograph located in the collection of the Historic Preservation Commission by State Historian, Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr. Taken from an early stereograph, the image reveals this very portrait hanging alone above a curved Roman-style doorway in the State House Hall of Flags. The photographer, F.A. Morrill of New Sharon, was active from 1869 to about 1874. His projects included photographing the public buildings of Augusta.²¹
After about a year, French sent a short narrative of his recollections to the museum, clarifying his renewed acquaintance with the portrait. He had first viewed the painting in 1948 when he was eight years old. At the time, the portrait hung over the fireplace mantel in the Rowayton, Connecticut, home of a neighbor, Stella Gann Aiken. The youngster was told that the portrait was William King, first governor of Maine, and that it was “painted by the famous artist Gilbert Stuart.” During a visit to his childhood home in the early 1990s, French decided to stop by to see the neighbor, now an elderly lady. He wrote, “after a good visit, as I was driving out of her yard, I noticed in the rear view mirror she was motioning to call me back. She told me to retrieve the portrait stored against the wall in the cellar, and that it was mine and I should take it back to Maine. The Governor was going home to Kingfield.”

Upon his return from Connecticut, French built a new wooden crate for the framed portrait. Ten years passed before he visited the State House in Augusta. There, in a Hall of Flags display case, was an enlarged copy of the Historic Preservation photograph. French was amazed to recognize his William King portrait in the image. He even recalled the coil of wire visible that still remained on the framed work. However, French had no further information to offer about the portrait’s past.

State Library Director Gary Nichols made an unusual and timely discovery: a library book contained an old newspaper clipping with a reference to a William King portrait. Barely discernable in the worn crease of the folded paper, the article revealed the name of a “Mrs. Gilman, of Waterville.” Research into the histories of Waterville disclosed the prominent name of Nathaniel Gilman (1779-1859). Gilman maintained a seasonal mansion in Waterville, though his year-round residence was Brooklyn, New York, where he had developed a lucrative import business in leather goods. It appears that Gilman’s Waterville business interests, which included international shipping, ship building, and banking, overlapped those of William King, whose home and businesses were located about thirty miles down the Kennebec River. Like King, Gilman was a trustee at Waterville College. The two men held business and professional bonds, but upon further investigation it turns out a closer relationship evolved.

A Connection of Substance

Joanna’s parents were Ebenezer Little Boyd (1768-1841), a Baptist minister of South Berwick, and Sarah Frazier Boyd (1775-1837), formerly of Boston, older sister to William King’s wife, Ann Frazier King. Joanna lived periodically with the King family in Bath and “seems to have been a star in Governor King’s family.” In fact, Joanna’s name was mentioned in a few letters, establishing her presence in the King household. 25

Nathaniel Gilman, in his hand-scripted will made a year before he died in 1859 at age eighty, noted “her portrait” in the same context as listing diamonds, a gold chain, and other personal objects to be left to his wife Joanna. 26 This, her portrait, almost certainly the same oil-on-canvas brought to the museum by Peter French in 2001, had for many years hung in the Waterville home of Nathaniel and Joanna Gilman. Events following the death of Joanna Gilman on October 21, 1880, connected new information to the text of the newspaper clipping, confirming that the French-owned portrait of William King had hung in the State House Hall of Flags rotunda for over thirty years.

Unraveling the Root Sources

Frazier Gilman, son of Joanna, lived in Eden, South Dakota, at the time of his mother’s death. Assigned executor of her estate in 1881, he returned to Waterville. It appears that during this visit he learned of the State House location of the William King portrait, the same acquired over one hundred years later by Peter French. Possibly out of curiosity Frazier would have made a trip to Augusta to see the portrait as it hung above the Roman-style doorway in the rotunda. Observing the framed likeness of William King, his great uncle, here in the State House, Frazier must have recalled the portrait from his childhood as it once hung in the family home.

To clarify the circumstances of how the portrait was removed from the Gilman home to Augusta, a new, but important and historically well-respected figure enters the scene. Sometime after the death of Nathaniel Gilman in 1859, Hon. James Gillespie Blaine paid a visit to Mrs. Gilman, perhaps a visit of condolence. It is possible the Blaines, who had moved to Augusta in 1854, had been on the social calendar of the Gilmans of Waterville and vice versa.

Blaine wrote on July 17, 1884, to the Governor and Council: “[It
was] my personal request in 1860 [to Joanna Gilman], for the portrait in oil of Governor William King, now hanging in the rotunda, the State has no claim whatever to it.” Although Frazier contacted Blaine in 1884, he did not pursue the portrait seriously until seven years later in 1891. That year he appointed L.D. Carver of Augusta as “agent and attorney” and wrote to Governor Edwin C. Burleigh, to “demand and receive for me, the portrait of Ex-Governor King now hanging in the rotunda.” Carver’s correspondence to the Governor and Council explained: “Mr. Frazier Gilman, Administrator upon the Estate of his mother Joanna B. Gilman, late, of Waterville, Maine, has written me a letter requesting me to lay before you his claim to the oil portrait of Ex-Gov. Wm. King now in the rotunda of the State House.”

Carver’s letter explained that Blaine had borrowed Mrs. Gilman’s portrait of William King to hang temporarily in its present position during the winter of 1860-1861, when there was a “Governor’s Jubilee” in the State House. The portrait was finally removed almost a year later and returned to Frazier Gilman.27 Frazier Gilman passed away June 26, 1931. Named in his will, among his direct heirs were “Isabel B. Gilman Gann, daughter; Stella L. Gilman, stepdaughter and Stella Gann (Aiken) granddaughter, all of Norwalk, Connecticut.”28

Now, knowing the almost complete provenance of the “French” portrait, it is important to verify Stella (Gann) Aiken’s statement that the work was painted by Gilbert Stuart. A review of Stuart’s individual torso portraits reveals the master occasionally used the familiar hand-in-book device and proportioned the sitter low in the picture plane, but Stuart’s strong style, his approach to portraiture, and his handling of brush and paint have an immediacy, a freshness and vitality missing from the distanced, reserved presentation of the “French” portrait.29

In spring 2004, Ellen G. Miles, a renowned Stuart scholar, visited the museum to view the portrait. Miles quickly disproved the Gilbert Stuart attribution. The design of the canvas maker’s imprint, “Edward Dechaux, New York,” on the portrait’s linen canvas support dated the portrait to no earlier than 1834—six years after Gilbert Stuart’s death.30

Miles suggested Chester Harding (1792-1866), a painter of notable persons and statesman, as a possible artist. Two Harding portraits, one of his friend Daniel Webster, made in 1848, and that of Charles Carroll, 1888, have similar compositions to that of the King portrait, particularly the general proportion of figure to ground. These works also display the
“finger-in-book” pose. From 1834 to 1848 Harding painted in Boston and Washington D.C., making him a strong contender as author of this portrait.31

William King was in his late sixties in 1834, a period when his finances began to decline with losses in his bank and his shipping business.32 Against this background, it would seem that this portrait was not commissioned by King. However, it is a portrait from life. The circumstances of the King-Gilman connection at the time of the sitting suggest Nathaniel Gilman could have ordered the likeness to give to his new wife Joanna on the occasion of their 1836 marriage. Joanna, who had lived for so many years close to her ailing cousin Mary Elizabeth in Bath, surely became endeared to the King family. William King could very well have introduced Nathaniel Gilman, a widower, to his prospective second wife.

A King Likeness Created for the Early State House Portrait Collection

The earliest reference made to a State House “portrait gallery” seems to be in the letter of James L. Child entitled “Memorial,” that he deposited with the Legislature on March 29, 1859. Child suggested in his carefully scripted message, “that a Portraiture History of Governors of Maine, since the Separation, might be accomplished, my belief, that those now living and friends of the dead would cheerfully furnish the portraits, on invitation.” The State responded within a few days. Apparently legislators had already considered such a project and awaited a final report; they decided to not create legislation for a portrait gallery.33

It was the following year that Hon. James G. Blaine undertook to acquire portraits for the Capitol building. Having approached Mrs. Gilman for the King portrait in 1859, he was apparently planning ahead: Blaine wrote to the grandson of Senator John Holmes asking for a portrait of the senator to “hang with those of Governor Pownall, Governor King, Governor Lincoln, and Reuel Williams we have already secured or soon expect to have to hang in the rotunda the winter of 1860.”34

Blaine’s letter perhaps was speculative. The monumental oil-on-canvas of George Washington, painted in 1836 by Thomas Truman Spear (1803-1882), was the only portrait hanging in the State House in 1859.35 Records have not been found to affirm that any of the portraits Blaine proposed “were already secured,” as he stated, for the jubilee party, with one exception: the Gilman-owned canvas of Governor William King. Though the March 5, 1861 gala for over fifteen hundred invited guests,
given by Mrs. Washburn, was recorded in the local *Kennebec Journal*, and later recalled by Governor Washburn in his diary, no details were noted of portraits hanging in the ornately-decorated rotunda.³⁶

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It would be decades before Child’s portrait gallery idea would be pursued in earnest, leading to the next painted likeness of Governor King. In 1900, State Superintendent of Buildings Col. Ezra Stevens had arrived not only with an idea, but a plan and the personal energy to create a gallery of “eminent Maine men,” including governors, justices, and notable figures who had represented Maine in the House of Representatives and Senate in Washington. The portraits hanging in the State House in 1900 were those of George Washington, received 1836; General Henry Knox, received 1861; Sir Thomas Pownall and Sir William Pepperrell received 1862; Abraham Lincoln, received 1868; and General Neal Dow, received 1899.³⁷

Col. Stevens had initiated the project with letters to descendants of the public servants asking them to “provide a portrait in oil, set in a gilded frame of their relation to be honored in the gallery of the capitol rotunda.” Hon. Marquis F. King of Portland, president of the Maine Genealogical Society, assisted Stevens with his own extensive outreach to find relatives of public figures. Gradually the responses were received and the rotunda walls began to fill. The *Kennebec Journal* regularly followed the portraits’ pursuit and their arrivals with updated stories in its columns from 1900 through 1904.³⁸

A “relative of William King,” (incorrectly identified in the *Journal*) “lived in Paris,” and was “an artist of repute and a portrait painter.” According to the news article, Ann Nesbeth King was asked to provide a likeness of her notable grandfather. After some time, it became clear that the portrait was not going to materialize. Maine needed a portrait of the first governor to represent Maine in the Pan American Exposition, Buffalo, New York, and with some haste, artist Delbert Dana Coombs (1850-1938) of Lisbon Falls was selected. This portrait currently hangs in the Hall of Flags in the State House.³⁹

In a letter to the State Librarian in 1920, Coombs recalled the 1901 commission: “the summer of 1901 I had but a short time to complete the picture . . . I had all the help possible from the State, Col. Stevens, taking great interest for the Governor King portrait. It was hard to find photographs of Governor King, I think the picture that guided me
Portrait of William King, 1901. According to D.D. Coombs, a number of references were used to create this portrait. They included an “old daguerrotype” and his studies of period portraits of public persons and statesmen posed from life.

DELBERT DANA COOMBS, born in Lisbon Falls, Maine (1850-1938). Oil on Canvas 50 1/8" x 40 1/3". State House Portrait Collection, Maine State Museum, Augusta. Commissioned by the State in 1901.
mostly for his likeness was an old daguerreotype. I got all the information in regard to costume, studying portraits painted at that period.” It should be noted that if indeed a daguerreotype did exist showing William King from a frontal view he would have been no younger than seventy-five years old. It is not clear, but perhaps Coombs referred to the framed painted drawing of William King, which most likely was hanging in the Senate Secretary’s hallway in 1900, now in the Maine State Archives collections. Though he painted King’s hair darker, the viewpoint is the same and comparative to the original source, the portrait owned by Peter French.

Coombs’ portrait placed the seated governor in a white wrap-around cravat with a tie and a white button-down vest. Frilled cuffs appear out of the dark jacket sleeves. His left hand rests on what appears to be a formal document, his signature clearly in view. Coombs composed the background with stately columns and drapery pulled aside, a common device used in portraiture of statesmen. Beyond the drawn-back drape, he painted a vignette of the Kennebec River. Coombs explained, “these elements (pose, document, drapery, columns, vignette) combine the traditional ideas of mid-nineteenth century portraiture of public persons.”

Coombs left a technical note, still attached, on the bottom of the frame for handling in transit, thus suggesting the freshness of the work. “Please be careful about getting dust on the picture as the surface is not hard and everything will stick to it.” It appears that a fire broke out in the New England building at the Buffalo Exposition, damaging the portrait. Though insured for $1500.00, Col. Stevens claimed that “the paintings cannot be cleaned and new ones will have to be painted.” Despite this assessment, less than a month later, the Coombs portrait was hung in the rotunda.

Coombs’s Country Gentleman

Coombs created a second, more informal portrait, a few years later for the Kingfield Public Library. After it was displayed in the library the portrait hung in the Hotel Herbert. Coombs dated the Kingfield version in 1916, a year coinciding with the one hundredth anniversary of Kingfield’s incorporation. The event was memorialized by unveiling a brass plaque mounted on a large boulder on the corner of the William King homestead property. During King’s lifetime, Kingfield had been his second home. His wife Ann named “Kingfield” for her husband. Owning
Portrait of William King, 1916, painted by D.D. Coombs in 1916 to hang in honor of the hundred-year celebration of the incorporation of Kingfield. King is portrayed in a more leisurely setting, with a view of the Carrabassett River and hills beyond, originally visible from his Kingsfield home and property.

30,000 acres, William King was the community’s principal proprietor.

The King portrait now hangs in the Kingfield Historical Society, located on High Street, a few houses up the hill from the original King homestead. The canvas is in remarkably good condition. Set in a fine, gilt frame, the Kingsfield portrait presents a torso view of the subject seated. The representation of the subject’s head and face is almost identical to the Hall of Flags likeness. King wears a jacket, vest, and white wrap-around cravat over a ruffled shirt. A framed canvas more suitable in size for the walls of a private home, the likeness reflects a country gentleman and tells a different story from the official painting. A book lies on a window ledge adjacent to the sitter, suggesting a moment of leisure. Behind, a drape pulled aside reveals a charming river and mountain scene. Logs float in the Carrabassett River. A mill, possibly Landers Mill, rests on the opposite shore of Stanley Hill and in the distance one clearly views Vose Mountain, attesting to Coombs’ careful documentation of the Kingfield site. Landscape and pastoral scenes were well represented in Coomb’s personal painting portfolio.44

A Photograph Captures an Aged Leader

The daguerreotype of which Coombs spoke remains undocumented. The only known photographic portrait image of William King is held by the Maine Historical Society in Portland. It is a cased tintype, a process also known as a ferrotype or melainotype. The one eighth plate, 6.5 cm x 7 cm tintype, was given to the Historical Society in 1965 by Albert S. Mitchell, a descendant of the Southgate family.45 The image portrays a close view of William King showing only his head and shoulder in profile. Two characteristics of the tintype portrait deserve attention. First, it represents a copy of a daguerreotype portrait and secondly, it views the subject in a close-cropped, intimate profile.

It is important to note here that the presence of daguerreotype photography as a new medium coincided with William King’s last years. The daguerreotype, early on devoted to studio portraiture and brought to America in 1839, released the domain of portraiture from the artist’s hand. Its true-to-nature likeness of the sitter, a view previously unimaginable, came to be in great demand. Studio daguerreotype portraiture found its way to Boston about 1841 as evidenced in an advertisement of the T.H. Darling Daguerreotype Studio at No. 62 Milk Street. Daguerreotype portraits were available in major cities in Maine by 1844. Advertisements with eye-catching tag lines, such as, “Life is uncertain”
“Catch the shadow e’er the substance fades” appeared in the 1849 The Biddeford Weekly Herald. Photographer J.G. Robinson offered “perfect likenesses for only one dollar!!” Closer to home, perhaps a member of the William King household saw this advertisement in the Bath, Daily Northern Tribune. J.W. Morrison advertised his “City Daguerrian Gallery, since August 21, 1847. At his old rooms, four doors North of the Elliot House, Front Street.” Morrison invited “the public to call and examine specimens of his work among which may be found many familiar faces,” and “pictures taken of sick and deceased persons by leaving orders at his rooms.”

Small enough to be held in one’s hand, the daguerreotype of William King, a unique silver-on-copper image, was handsomely set in an embossed brass frame under protective glass and placed in a satin or velvet-lined hinged case with a hook lock. The case material at first was leather,
but later an ornamental embossed plastic union case became common. This elegant and secure approach to presentation and preservation of the portrait image was popular, as was the soon to follow ambrotype, a photograph on glass, and the tintype, the object of this discussion.

Though designated “an insane person” by 1848 at age eighty, some time between the mid-1840s and 1852 William King sat for a daguerreotype portrait. Years later, a photographer using a tintype camera made a copy of this original. This practice was not common, but may have been done to preserve the image. In keeping with the integrity of the original daguerreotype, the tintype copy was set in a hinged leather case. The glass-covered profile image was centered in an oval passé-par tout, cut out of a brass frame and edged with embossed ornamentation.48

It should be noted that “close profile” is not a common pose seen in early photographic portraiture, although there are exceptions. Joseph Struble, Curator of Historical Photographs at the George Eastman House, suggested the profile might have been made to serve as a model for a future bas-relief medallion. The close profile pose is similar to the neo-classical portrait profile made popular by the engraver St. Memin (1770-1852) and used by sculptors since ancient times for commemorative medals. William King, whose lifetime closely overlapped St. Memin, may very well have been familiar with the artist’s profile portrait of Thomas Jefferson, this being the popular likeness by which Jefferson was known in America and abroad. King’s photographic profile, taken at an advanced age, portrays the often noted heavy dark “forest-like” brows and thick white hair, verifying the recollection of a contemporary. The governor had “bright piercing eyes shadowed by heavy coal-black eyebrows which retained their color after his hair became white.” King might have had personal thoughts of his permanent legacy with this portrait, later preserved by his descendants in the form of a tintype copy.49

National Capitol Souvenir

To complete the portfolio of known William King likenesses, the larger-than-life full-figure statue of him must be considered. Recalled as a “noble representation,” the marble work portrays the uniformed, authoritative figure of General King. He wears the cape for which he was known, flowing from his shoulders. A witness to the unveiling commented to the Bath Times: the statue “recalled the younger more vigorous William King, taking stately steps up the aisle of the Old North
Statue of William King. This marble bust of William King by Maine sculptor Franklin Bacheldor Simmons (1839-1913) was received into the National Statuary Hall in January 1878. The statue represents an idealized and monumental remembrance of the Governor, symbolizing the State of Maine. It holds an honored place in Statuary Hall in the Capitol Building, Washington, D.C.
Portrait of William King, n.d. A portrait based on the circa 1834 model that hung for many years in the Hall of Flags. Framed in mahogany with a brass label, this portrait of Maine’s first governor hung in the Senate Chamber Hallway.

**ARTIST UNKNOWN.** Undated. Watercolor and gouache over pencil. Collection of the Maine State Archives.
Church with his blue cloak falling back from his shoulders displaying the scarlet lining, a touch of color in the somber meeting house.” Commissioned to represent the State of Maine, the sculpture remains a permanent installation in the National Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol. James G. Blaine, who unveiled the sculpture on January 22, 1878, commented that “no one could pass it without being arrested by the striking features, the intellectual strength and energetic expression.”

Born in Webster, Maine, the artist, Franklin Bachelder Simmons (1839-1913), was largely self-taught. After leaving college he made a successful career of carving medallion portraits, busts, and full statues of prominent American figures. He was also known for his creative mythological sculptures. Known locally as “Frank” Simmons, he sculpted bust portraits of Maine notables early in his career and earned words of encouragement in newspaper commentaries. He spent much of his life in Italy, where he established a studio in 1868 and where he died. Simmons formed the William King sculpture, as he did his other notable subjects, in part through an idealistic representation, suitable for its mission in the national capitol.

The details of William King’s likenesses set the created works in their historical context. Recollections, letters, manuscripts, and legal records allow for a glimpse of the human side of the portraits and their enduring value to William King’s legacy, on both personal and historical levels.

APPENDIX

A Model

The Maine State Archives holds in its collection a fine pencil sketch based on the William King portrait that hung in the State House. The framed 8” x 10” drawing, undated and unsigned, had been carefully enhanced with pen line and finished with opaque watercolor. King wears a dark brown jacket, posed against a shallow background of deep blue vertical bands. The face, the pose, details of clothing, and the “cravat pin” all refer directly to the “French” canvas. Framed in mahogany wood with a brass label, the piece hung in the Senate Chamber hallway, one of a set of governors’ portraits, before its transfer to the Archives.
Attributed portrait of William King, n.d. Painted from life, the figure attributed to be William King is portrayed as a torso of a young man with a full face, trimmed beard, white shirt, and black jacket, with a black collar and wrap-around cravat. This portrait needs further study. The portrait hangs in the Governor William King Lodge, #219, Scarborough.

**ARTIST UNKNOWN. Date Unknown. Oil on Canvas 21" x 26". Collection of the Scarborough Historical Society and Museum.**

**A Possible Youthful Reflection**

William King’s earliest attributed portrait, noted in the introduction, is little known to the general public. An unidentified artist painted the undated oil-on-canvas that hangs in the William King Lodge #219, in Scarborough. The work reflects a young man, perhaps well before age...
twenty, dressed with black wrap-around cravat and dark high-collared jacket. The light eyes and fine brow-line do not reflect the features found in the few life portraits of William King and recalled by his contemporaries. The finely executed portrait is mounted in an unusual pale gilt wood frame with an oval passé-partout, ornamented with bas relief sculpted pears placed in each corner. The portrait was previously owned by Scarborough resident Otho P. Baker and given by him to the Scarborough Historical Society and Museum about 1962. Baker’s 1981 obituary explained he was a portrait painter and noted his excellent formal art studies, which may have contributed to his appreciation of this portrait’s historic and artistic value. This worthy portrait on canvas is in need of conservation, and its frame will have to be further studied before we have a conclusive identification of the subject’s identity.

NOTES


William, b. Feb. 9, 1768, at Scarborough; d. in Bath, Jan. 17, 1852. He m. Ann N. Frazier of Boston (b. 1782; d. in Portland, July 4, 1857) in 1800; and their children were: Mary Elizabeth, b. Sept. 28, 1817, d. unm. 1847; Cyrus William, b.

* Information obtained from James G. King, of Cambridge, MA; Probate, Wiscasset, v. 84-15. See also Leonard Bond Chapman, Notes on William King, First Governor of Maine (reprinted from the Deering News), p. 147, Maine Historical Society; Cyrus William's letters to his father, William King letters, Maine Historical Society, Portland.


12. Letter from Flatbush, Long Island, November 19, 1884, Maine State Library, Vertical File, Governors Portraits; Art Collection Records, e-mailed by Paul A. D’Alessandro; examples seen at the Maine Historical Society; cabinet card style souvenir portraits of William King with brief biographical notes were reproduced by printers such as G.M. Donham, Portland; G.B. Webber Photographers, Brunswick; and the Lamson Studio, Portland.


15. Frick Art Reference Library, New York, provenance of the miniature detailed.

16. Frick Art Museum and Reference Library, New York, Assistant Reference Librarian James Mitchell, initial contact April, 2001. The library records include a photographic copy of a miniature portrait of William King by Edward Greene Malbone documented with the complete provenance from Ann N. Frazier to James Gore King VI of Alaska ; Governor John E. Baldacci to James Gore King VI, November 7, 2006.

17. Gift to Maine State Museum from the Estate of Harold C. Marden (1900-1994), Marden, Dubord, Bernier & Stevens, Waterville; Robert A. Marden to Honorable John Baldacci, February 21, 2006; Maine Times, January 9, 1976. Joseph T. Harris was active in Portland, 1830-1834; two portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Elisha Trowbridge of Mechanic St., Portland (1830), represent Harris’s more mature technique, listed by Barridoff Galleries.


19. Eastern Argus, July 17, August 11, October 2, 1829; Chapman, Notes on William King, pp. 91-93; Ernest Cummings Marriner, The History of Colby College (Waterville: Colby College, 1963 [c1962]), p. 10; Board of Trustees second meeting, Sept. 23, 1813.


21. F.A. Morrill, “Views of the Public Buildings at Augusta, Maine.” Found on verso of the stereograph were listed twenty views: “Views of the Public Buildings at Augusta, Maine. F.A. Morrill, Photographer, New Sharon, Maine.” “No. 1 STATE HOUSE A.; No. 2 STATE HOUSE B; No. 3 Rotunda of the State House A; No. 4 simply described, stereo views required two images of the same view taken 2 ½” apart, like each lens forming an image equivalent to what would be seen by one eye. The two prints are mounted on a 3 ½" x 7" card. Viewed with a stereoscope, the two prints transformed into a single three-dimensional realistic effect. The stereograph’s lifespan in America began about 1858 lasting until 1920. See: Robert A. Weinstein and Larry Booth, Collection, Use, and Care of Historical Photographs. 1977, American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, TN, pp. 186-189.


28. Copy of the Will of Frazier Gilman filed to the Court of Probate for the district of Norwalk, (Connecticut), June 30, 1931, Kennebec County Probate.

29. For discussion of Stuart’s style and the use of the finger-in-book device, see McLanathan, Gilbert Stuart, pp. 93, 129, 140, 142.


32. Smith, General William King, p. 127.

33. Memorial of James L. Child, “To the Legislature of Maine, March 29, 1859,” Maine State Archives, April, 1859. While the committee approved the “object,” the legislation was not approved.

35. Thomas Truman Spear to Governor Dunlap, February 23, 1836, Maine State Archives.


37. Kennebec Journal. October 14, 1900. The Dow portrait, by artist George McConnell (1852-1929) was received in 1899; the other four portraits were brought in about 30 years earlier. See letters from Samuel I. Bridge, November 11, 1861; Hon. S. Brannan, December 25, 1862; Charles Henry Granger, February 22, 1867, Maine State Archives.


44. Discussion with Curator Kirsten Brown Burbank, Kingfield Historical Society, August 9, 2006. See Coombs’s oversized oil on canvas of 1896, “Ricker’s Hill, Poland Spring,” which hangs in the Appropriations Committee Room of the State Capitol.


46. Yankee Farmer, July 31, 1841; Weekly Herald: An Independent Paper, Devoted to News, the Best Interests of the People and the Advocacy of Equal Rights 1 (Biddeford, Maine: January 13, 1849).


48. Probate, Wiscasset, vol. 84-15; Joseph R. Struble, Curator of Historical Photographs, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, e-mail May 8, 2006; results of disassembly of the tintype from its case at Maine Historical Society revealed the Providence, Rhode Island brass frame maker’s name to be Cooke & Emerson, Pat. no. 8. The Rhode Island Historical Society was unable to verify the maker’s business.

nealogical Recorder 1 (1884); A.S. Swasey, Genealogical Records: Maine and New Hampshire Settlers, 1600-1900s. Historical & Genealogical Recorder 2 (no. 1, 1885), p. 51; Joseph R. Struble, George Eastman House, suggested the profile might have been made to serve as a model for a future bas-relief medallion. Struble also verified that the tintype was introduced in America in 1856, four years after King’s death. This confirms that the King tintype was a copy.


51. Maine Farmer, March 1, 1860; Jenkins, Study Number 3, 1947, I, p.1; XII, 46.

52. This small portrait hung in the hallway of the Senate Secretary’s office, State House, Augusta, with other similarly framed likenesses of governors. No date for removal. Artifact 347, Maine State Archives.