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THE HARVARD COLLEGE  
PORTRAIT OF WASHINGTON

PAINTED BY EDWARD SAVAGE

BY

JUSTIN WINSOR

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## SAVAGE'S PORTRAIT OF WASHINGTON.

EDWARD SAVAGE was born in Princeton, Mass., in 1761, and died in that town in July, 1817. He was originally a goldsmith; but later turned for a livelihood to painting portraits and to engraving his own pictures. He acquired no great distinction, beyond securing a popular recognition for his engravings. Not long after Washington's inauguration, Savage, then in Boston, and intending to go to New York, suggested to President Willard of Harvard College, that if the painter was made the bearer of a request to Washington to sit for a picture to be the property of the College, he would be glad to paint it and give it to the Corporation. Such a request of Washington Willard made in a letter dated November 7, 1789, adding that "it would be exceedingly grateful to all the governors of this Society, if the portrait of the man we so highly love, esteem, and revere, should be the property of, and placed within, Harvard College." Savage did not present this letter till shortly before December 23, 1789, for at that time Washington wrote to the President of the College, stating that he had received the request at Savage's hands a few days before, and that the limner was then at work on the picture. Washington's diary shows that he sat to Savage first on Monday, December 21 (three hours), Monday, 28th ("all the forenoon"), and Wednesday, January 6, 1790 (an hour and a half, "to finish the picture"). "I am induced," said Washington, "to comply with this request from a wish that I have to gratify, as far as with propriety may be done, every reasonable desire of the patrons and promoters of science. And at the same time I feel myself flattered by the polite manner in which I am requested to give this proof of my sincere regard and good wishes for the prosperity of the University of Cambridge."

There was some delay in the picture (which is on a canvas 25 inches by 30) getting to its final resting-place, and this interval seems to have been improved by the painter, in making at least two copies of the portrait, one for John Adams, which has descended to Mr. Henry Adams, and the other, perhaps of smaller dimensions, or a mere sketch, which later served the artist in producing other pictures from which to make engravings. From such

a painting or sketch was probably made the picture described in a "Catalogue of a Loan Collection of Portraits, under the auspices of the Antiquarians of the Art Institute" (Chicago, 1894), as follows: "No. 363. Washington. Oil painting by Edward Savage. The present owner, the artist's grandson, has been told by his father that the panel on which the portrait is painted was taken from the door of a state coach of the reign of George III. The coach had been broken up, and Mr. Savage, then in London, secured it as a curiosity. Lent by Charles H. Savage, Chicago."

The Adams picture has been heliographed in the "Centennial of Washington's Inauguration," edited by C. W. Bowen, New York, 1892, where it can be compared with the Harvard picture, also reproduced there. This comparison will show that the replica varies slightly in some particulars of costume.

In October, 1790, Washington, being then in Boston, received from the College an expression of gratitude for his services, in a formal address. In replying to it, the President hoped that the "Muses might long enjoy a tranquil residence within the walls of the University."

The original picture is not alluded to in these proceedings, and had not apparently at that time been received in Cambridge. It was not placed in Harvard Hall probably till shortly before August 30, 1791, when the President and Fellows "voted that the thanks of this Corporation be given to Mr. Edward Savage, portrait painter, for his polite and generous attention to the University, in painting a portrait of the President of the United States, taken by him from the life; and that Mr. Savage's brother be requested to transmit to him this vote."

We have direct testimony to the faithfulness of Savage's work as a likeness in the opinion of Josiah Quincy, later President of the College. Mr. Edmund Quincy, in a Life of his father, says that President Quincy always declared "that the portrait by Savage in the College Dining-room in Harvard Hall was the best likeness he had ever seen of Washington, though its merits as a work of art were but small. . . . One day [says the younger Quincy] when talking over those times in his old age, I asked my father to tell me what were his recollections of Washington's personal presence and bearing. 'I will tell you,' said he, 'just how he

struck me. He reminded me of the gentlemen who used to come to Boston in those days to attend the General Court from Hampden or Franklin County in the western part of the State, — a little stiff in his person; not a little formal in his manners; not particularly at ease in the presence of strangers. He had the air of a country gentleman not accustomed to mix much in society, perfectly polite; but not easy in his address and conversation, and not graceful in gait and movement.' ”

Savage's picture became popular enough in engravings, many of them not closely resembling the original, to make reproductions of it a source of profit to the artist for some years, while its popularity lasted. Savage had probably already gone to London, at the time the College requested his brother to transmit its vote to him. He there became for a while a pupil of Benjamin West. He had taken with him in some form the likeness which he had painted for the College. This sketch or drawing he used as the basis of an oval engraving in stipple, published in London, February 7, 1792. This plate professes to be engraved by Savage “from the original picture painted in 1790, for the Philosophical Chamber at the University of Cambridge in Massachusetts.” This engraving, slightly retouched about the hair, was used in “Washington's Monuments of Patriotism,” published at Philadelphia (1800) just after Washington's death. Another plate, somewhat smaller than Savage's, was made in 1793, and published by E. Jeffery, August 10, 1793. Some tinted copies of this were issued. New engravings of Savage's London print appeared in Washington's “Official Letters to Congress,” Boston, 1796, engraved by S. Hill; in “Epistles from General Washington,” New York, 1796, engraved in stipple by Rollenson; in the *Philadelphia Monthly Magazine* in 1798, engraved by Houston; in “Legacies of Washington, Trenton, 1800, engraved by W. Harrison; and in “Washingtonia,” Baltimore, 1800, engraved by Tanner. J. C. Buttre, of New York, reëngraved it in mezzotint in 1865, and O'Neill of New York in stipple in the same year, but the badge of the Cincinnati was omitted in this last one.

Savage published a new and larger plate (18×14 inches) in London in 1793, which is quite different as a composition from the Harvard picture. It represents Washington sitting at a table and holding a plan of the future city of Washington, and has this

inscription : "E. Savage, Pinx. et Sculp. GEORGE WASHINGTON, Esq., President of the United States of America. From the original portrait, painted at the request of the Corporation of the University of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Published by E. Savage. June 25, 1793." There is a copy of this engraving in Harvard College Library. Later a new plate, a trifle narrower, was made, with a few changes in surroundings.

This picture was reproduced, with some accessories omitted, in Winterbotham's "View of the United States," New York, 1796. Prints of it were also published at Providence in 1800, and later, from retouched plates, engraved by Wm. Hamlin. The figure is in civil dress, and does not have the badge of the Cincinnati Society, as the original military picture had, but the view of the head is much the same.

A large group-picture by Savage was better known in the early part of this century than any of the engravings from his single likenesses of Washington. In this composite picture the figure of the President was suggested by the picture of 1793. This showed, in a plate measuring  $18\frac{1}{2} \times 24\frac{1}{2}$  inches, a circle of Washington and his family, about a table, on which the plan under Washington's hand bore a plot of the new federal city. Mrs. Washington, the adopted children, and a negro servant make up the group. It was published in London March 10, 1798, and professed to be "painted and engraved by E. Savage." The sale of it demanded in time a new plate, and the impressions of this second issue are recognizable from some changes in the rosette of the hat lying upon the table. It was reengraved by Sartain in mezzotint at a later day. The original canvas was acquired by the Boston Museum in 1840, and is said to have been bought in 1892 by William F. Havemeyer, of New York.

I have made use of W. S. Baker's "Engraved Portraits of Washington," Philadelphia, 1880, in supplementing my own memoranda on Savage and his work.

*Justin Winsor, '53.*









