

New Home For Matched Portraits

George Jaffrey Located In Missouri (With Lucy)

by Robert Stephenson

Back around Thanksgiving there was an item in **The Ledger** about Mr. and Mrs. Homer Belletete presenting to the town of Jaffrey a reproduction of a portrait of George Jaffrey III, the town's namesake.

Not long after, I dropped by the town office and had a look. The Governor's Councilor and Portsmouth worthy peered down at me, a trace of a smile

on his face. He certainly appeared agreeable enough even jolly and contented.

This started me thinking: Where was the original painting? Who was the artist? Was it for sale (and dare I guess at what price)? Such thoughts set me on an interesting quest.

The article mentioned the Vose Gallery in Boston. Being on Newbury Street one day I ventured in to see what I could

learn. Vose has been well established in Boston for a number of years and has seen many fine American paintings pass in and out through its doors. Indeed, I was told by Terry Vose, the Jaffrey portrait had passed in and a year or so ago had passed out again. Where had it gone, I asked. Some checking yielded the surprising answer: the Albrecht Art Museum in St. Joseph,

Missouri.

I couldn't leave it at that so I wrote the museum and sent along a clipping about the Belletete's presentation and a few details about the town and its situation. Not long after I received a very nice letter from Jim Ray, the director. I also picked up another bit of new information: Not only do they have George on display but also

George Jaffrey to 10

George Jaffrey (from 1)

his wife, Lucy. In fact, they are a matched set of portraits. Both were a gift from the Kemper Foundation. The museum's 1978 Annual Report reproduces Mrs. Jaffrey's portrait. She appears to have been a handsome woman, thin of lip and straight of back, possibly rather formidable and, I suspect, perhaps not as jolly as her husband.

I wanted to know something about the painter. Mr. Ray provided some information and I did some digging at the Boston Atheneum. In the Town History, George's portrait is attributed to John Singleton Copley. This turns out to be incorrect, however.

According to Terry Vose, most every portrait painted at that time ended up being attributed to Copley. The artist was, in fact, Joseph Blackburn and nearly nothing is known about him. In fact, his first

name wasn't pinned down until the early 1900's. What can be ascertained, however, is that he was English or Scottish and that he spent the decade 1753-1763 in New England. He may have been a bit on the dull side, certainly solitary.

Lawrence Park in his *Joseph Blackburn - A Colonial Portrait Painter* (American Antiquarian Society, 1923) notes that "He apparently bought no property, associated himself with no church, involved himself in no legal entanglements and one finds no reference to wife or children." On the other hand, Mr. Park observes that "...judging from the social position of his sitters he must have been familiar with the best that New England had to offer..."

Mr. Jaffrey apparently was pleased with her portrait. Mary Russell asked her brother-in-law in a letter: "Tel Mr. Blackburn that Miss Lucy is in love with his Picktures wonders what businefs he has to make such extreem fine lace and satten besides taking so exact a

My curiosity is now somewhat sated. But as with the controversial Stuart portraits in Boston one could ask the question "Don't they really belong here?" I'll sidestep that one by encouraging any Jaffrey travelers through Missouri, to stop by the Museum in St. Joseph and give our regards to George and Lucy.

A resident of Jaffrey Center, Robert Stephenson is an editor of the "Jaffrey Center Occasional."