

Portrait of Cobb is real treasure

By KAREN CUBIE May 1
Gazette Staff Writer

"If only the portrait could talk," said Old Colony Historical Society Director Lisa Compton as she stared up at the General David Cobb picture overlooking the military room in Taunton's Historical Hall.

The Historical Society believes the portrait may have been painted by famous 18th-century portrait artist Gilbert Stuart, who is known for his depictions of such early American heroes as George Washington and Paul Revere.

"We're lucky to have it, whether it's a Stuart or not," Ms. Compton said. "A lot of other curators have looked at it and they say it could be."

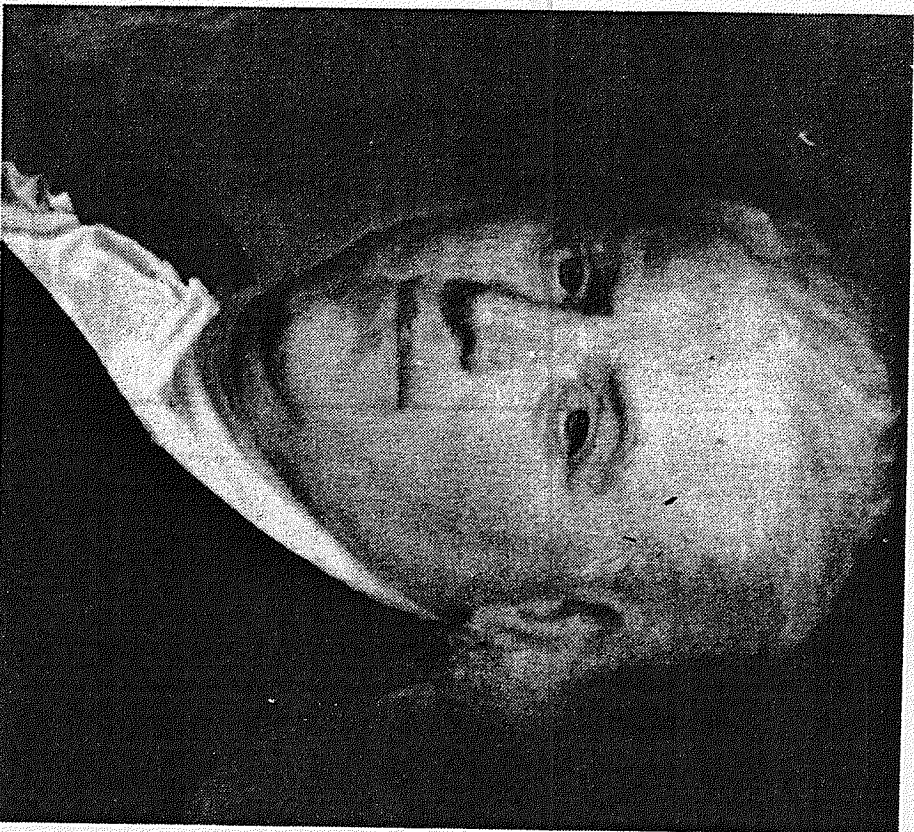
The society also possesses two engravings of General Cobb.

"It was typical throughout the 19th century to copy a painting in the engraving process," Ms. Compton explained. "Both of these engravings attribute the original painting to Stuart."

The two engravings, however, are different. One faces in a different direction from the Historical Hall painting and looks nothing like it. The other is an exact image with the subject facing in the same direction.

"That's another mystery," said Ms. Compton. "When engravings were made, the etching was done by looking at the painting. The engraving usually is a mirror image of the painting."

The portrait was donated to the historical society in 1891 by Mrs. Samuel Crocker Cobb, the widow



GENERAL DAVID COBB
Painting could be Stuart's work

of General Cobb's grandson and his last direct male descendant, Samuel Crocker Cobb, a three-year mayor of Boston.

"If the family says the portrait was painted by Stuart, that's a clue," Ms. Compton continued. "It is quite a find. A lot of scholarship has been done (on Stuart's paintings), and no one has ever known about this one."

A copy of the portrait hangs in the Boston State House where it was hung on Feb. 23, 1882 in honor of Cobb's service as a past president of the Senate.

"I went to Boston and saw the portrait in the Senate Chamber,"

Ms. Compton said. "It's obviously a bad copy of this painting. There's no doubt that this is the better one."

The Society's next step is to obtain grant money in order to send the portrait to Harvard's Fogg Museum, where it could be X-rayed and authenticated.

"Then we would at least know if we have something worth pursuing," she said.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: A story on General Cobb's life and accomplishments will appear in Friday's Gazette.)

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