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## *A Portrait of Samuel Finley Attributed to John Hesselius*

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In 2016, the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA) undertook a major research initiative focusing on their collection of American paintings and sculpture to 1945. The project was directed by Kimberly Orcutt, who was then serving as Mellon Curator at Large at the IMA and who hired me to work in New York City on behalf of the museum. One of my objectives was to investigate a portrait of the eighteenth-century religious leader and academic the Reverend Samuel Finley (1715–1766) attributed to John Hesselius (1728–1778) (fig. 1). Through extensive primary source research, I was able to uncover evidence that strongly

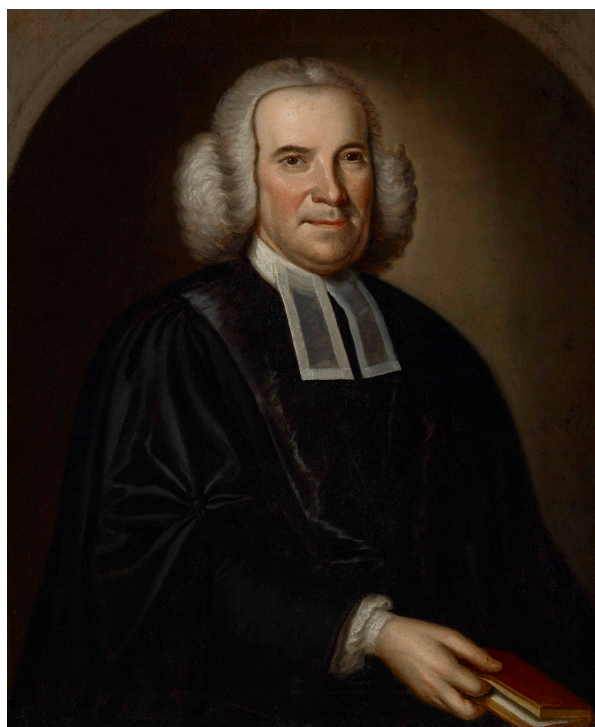


Fig. 1. Attributed to John Hesselius, *Portrait of the Reverend Dr. Samuel Finley*, 1766. Oil on canvas, 30 1/4 by 25 1/8 in. Indianapolis Museum of Art.

supports the attribution to Hesselius and assembled a more complete history of the picture and the family who owned it for almost two centuries before donating it to the IMA in 1962. I have also unraveled the relationship between this portrait and an 1870 copy by the little-known American painter Charles Walker Lind (c. 1842–c. 1880) (fig. 2). The copy is owned by Princeton University, where Finley served as president from 1761 until his death in 1766. Although it originally seemed

to be just an unimportant copy, the Princeton painting turned out to be the key to unlocking the history of the original.

Samuel Finley was born in County Armagh, which is now in Northern Ireland, in 1715, and came to this country with his family at age nineteen.<sup>1</sup> Historians believe he trained as a Protestant minister at the Log College in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> Finley came to be an influential preacher in New Jersey, Connecticut, and Maryland before being appointed in 1761 the fifth president of the College of New Jersey, which later became Princeton University.<sup>3</sup>

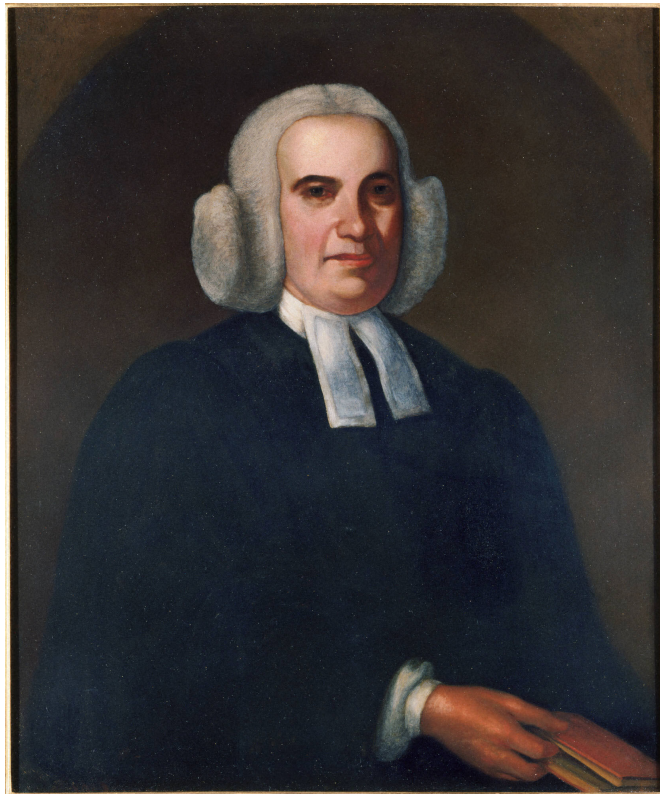


Fig. 2. Charles Walker Lind after John Hesselius. *Portrait of the Reverend Dr. Samuel Finley*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 29 15/16 x 25 in. Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.

At Princeton, Finley was an effective president: he was a respected and influential teacher and the college's enrollment grew steadily during his tenure. When he died in 1766 while undergoing medical treatment in Philadelphia, many Princeton students traveled there to pay respects and eight members of the senior class carried his body to the grave.<sup>4</sup> Lind's portrait of Finley was a gift of Samuel Finley Breese Morse (1791–1872)—the great grandson of Samuel Finley and the grandfather of Charles Lind—who donated it to Princeton in 1870.<sup>5</sup>

As part of my work for the IMA, I wanted to confirm the attribution of their

portrait. Because sources relating to Hesselius and his career are limited—there are no lists of sitters, ledgers, or diaries—I believed I was unlikely to find any documentation of an encounter with Finley there.<sup>6</sup> The painter was active in the mid-Atlantic region from 1750 to 1778, particularly in Anne Arundel County in Maryland, but I have found no records of him meeting Finley. Likewise few of Finley's papers survive,

although a small collection—mostly comprising letters from the late 1750s and early 1760s—is preserved at Princeton University. My search of this material also yielded no evidence of a meeting between Finley and Hesselius.

Scarcity of primary source material is a problem that scholars of colonial portraits often run up against, making researching and attributing these works inherently difficult. Seeking alternative approaches to the IMA portrait, I decided to explore the history and provenance of the copy at Princeton. Although it was painted by an obscure descendant of Finley whose career also lacks documentation, the donor of the painting was the renowned inventor and painter Samuel F. B. Morse. His extensive personal papers, including letters and diaries, are available online through the Library of Congress and seemed liable to contain information about the portraits.

As I had hoped, in the Morse papers I found a number of letters pertaining to both the original portrait of Finley, attributed to Hesselius, and the copy by Lind. The letters indicate that Morse commissioned Lind to make the copy directly from the original with the intention of donating it to Princeton. More importantly, the Morse papers record that in 1869 and 1870 the original clearly bore the inscription “J. Hesselius pinx.<sup>t</sup> 1766.” What follows is the narrative I have reconstructed from the letters.

In early 1869, Morse borrowed the original portrait of Finley from his cousin William Peronneau Finley (1803–1876) of Aiken, South Carolina. William was the son of James Edwards Finley (1758–1719) and the grandson of Samuel Finley. On February 1, Morse wrote his cousin offering “many thanks for your most acceptable letter of family history” and saying that he was “anxiously waiting the receipt of the box with the picture.”<sup>77</sup> A few months later, on April 16, 1869, Morse again wrote William, this time with a more extensive description of “the Portrait of our great and good Ancestor, President Finley.”

The Portrait arrived safely but I found it in a sad condition of disintegration. The defect in the eyes of the portrait is not from any direct violence to the surface, but is the effect of an original bad preparation of the canvas, which has caused the color to scale off, not only

upon the eyes but on parts of the face and dress, in small portions. It was very fortunate that it was not submitted for remedy to any one unacquainted with the maladies of paintings, and more fortunate that it was sent here in time to arrest the progress of the disease, which in a very short time would have left nothing but the canvas.

I have in my vicinity a most skillful physician of pictures, and you & your father will be satisfied to learn that the painting has been substantially fixed upon a new canvas, so that its further deterioration is effectually arrested. This now only necessary carefully to restore the parts that have scaled off and this I shall not boast to any one, for although I have not painted a picture for some 30 years, I intend to see that this portrait is perfectly restored. . . .

My wish is to make a copy of the Portrait for the gallery of Presidents of Nassau Hall. But this will take time in consequence of the pressure of other duties.<sup>8</sup>

Despite his intention to paint the copy, by the autumn of 1869 Morse had instead asked his grandson Charles Walker Lind to do it.<sup>9</sup> Lind was born in Arroyo, Puerto Rico, the only son of Morse's daughter Susan (1819–1885) and her husband, the wealthy island planter Edward Lind (b.?-d. 1882).<sup>10</sup> He graduated from Union College in Schenectady, New York, and from about 1865 to 1869 he studied painting in Paris in the private atelier of Léon Bonnat (1833–1922).<sup>11</sup> He was in New York City for several months in the second half of 1869, during which Morse enlisted him to make the copy.<sup>12</sup> Lind was unable to complete the commission before returning to Puerto Rico that November and brought both the original and the unfinished canvas with him when he sailed home that month.<sup>13</sup> Morse instructed Edward Lind to pay his son the sum of one hundred dollars in gold once he completed the copy, to be deducted from a debt that Edward owed Morse.<sup>14</sup>

By March 1870, Morse was anxious to have both portraits back in New York.<sup>15</sup> They arrived the following month on a ship from Puerto Rico, as shown by a letter Morse wrote to the Collector of the Port of New York requesting him to waive any applicable import taxes.<sup>16</sup> And so by May 1870 Morse was ready to return the original to his cousin William Peronneau Finley in South Carolina. In an accompanying letter to he

wrote, “I am thinking there may possibly be some wonder expressed in your homestead in Aiken respecting the fate of the Portrait of our venerated ancestor Dr. Samuel Finley . . . . It has had adventures & travels, since it left the Sunny South.”<sup>17</sup> Morse went on to reiterate the condition issues and treatment that he had outlined in his April 16, 1869 letter to his cousin.

He then explained making the copy to give to Princeton: “I intended originally to attempt this copy myself, but although ‘the spirit was willing’ I found the ‘flesh to be weak,’ and so I delegated the duty to my Grandson Charles Walker Lind . . . who is now a professional painter.”<sup>18</sup> Finley’s letter suggests that he neglected to request his cousin’s permission to ship it back and forth to Puerto Rico. “Now came a difficulty,” he wrote describing the situation:

Shall I allow the young painter to take this precious original to the West Indies, and send both back when the copy was finished? I trembled to decide upon this latter proposition, for I appreciated the risk, but knowing his carefulness, I ventured to allow him to take the picture with him. So the Portrait has visited Puerto Rico. It is returned to me in perfect preservation. The copy is completed, and will be sent to Princeton in a few days, and the Original is packed and transmitted to you by Express.<sup>19</sup>

This letter contains the most in depth discussion of the original portrait and the most compelling evidence to support its attribution to Hesselius. “The picture is of a higher character as a picture than I at first supposed,” Finley wrote.

I find the name of the Artist upon it, to wit; “J. Hesselius pinx.<sup>t</sup> 1766.” You will find it, if you have not before observed it, on the left of the picture about halfway down. From the date 1766, it must have been taken shortly before [Finley’s] death, which occurred in 1766 at the age of 50.<sup>20</sup>

The inscription that Morse described is consistent with those that appear on other works by Hesselius, including *Mrs. Richard Galloway* (1764; The Metropolitan Museum of Art).<sup>21</sup> (figs. 3, 4) The artist usually

inscribed his canvases on the back; Morse does not state whether the inscription he recorded was on the front or the back of the canvas. Members of the IMA staff have thus far been unable to find any inscription on the canvas. This is not altogether surprising: we know from Morse's letter to his cousin that the painting underwent extensive conservation and relining in 1869.

The IMA curatorial files document that the painting was in extremely poor condition when it entered their collection, and that it underwent additional conservation in 1965. This campaign included removing and replacing the 1869 lining, which had become brittle and separated from the canvas; and addressing extensive paint loss on the surface, including removing the 1869 restorer's oil paint and then infilling the losses

with gesso and acrylic paint.<sup>22</sup> Considering the condition issues the painting suffered and the extent of the two conservation efforts, it is possible that the inscription that Morse recorded was inadvertently covered or removed. I have suggested that the IMA complete a more thorough examination.

We can feel certain that the portrait in the IMA is the same one that William Peronneau Finley sent to Samuel F. B. Morse. Research in the genealogy of the Finley family reveals that the provenance of the work is straightforward from the sitter, Samuel Finley, to Marietta Davis Finley Hahn, who donated it to the IMA in 1962.<sup>23</sup>

Megan Holloway Fort. "A Portrait of Samuel Finley Attributed to John Hesselius." *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 3 no. 1 (Summer, 2017). <https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.1592>.



Fig. 3. John Hesselius. *Mrs. Richard Galloway*, 1764. Oil on canvas, 36 3/4 x 30 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

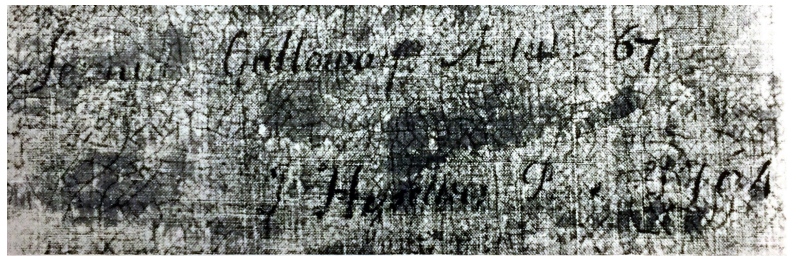


Fig. 4. Inscription on reverse of painting in Fig. 3.

Rev. Samuel Finley (1715–1766) m. Sarah Hall

V

James Edwards Finley (1758–1819) m. Mary Peronneau

V

William Peronneau Finley (1803–1876) m. Anna Maria Harris Gibson

V

Leighton Finley (1856–1894) m. Ida Davis

V

Marietta Davis Finley (1890–1969) m. Vernon Hahn

For me one of the most compelling aspects of art historical research is the problem solving involved, in particular strategizing different and unexpected ways to find information. This is especially useful in researching colonial portraits, where source material is often scarce. My decision to delve into the Princeton portrait of Finley by Lind, instead of simply disregarding it as an uninspired copy, led to a valuable trove of information about the “adventures & travels” of the IMA painting. Although I do not know whether the museum will change their designation to “by” Hesselius rather than “attributed to,” particularly if conservators are unable to locate the inscription Morse detailed, I do believe that this documentation reinforces the attribution and adds valuable details to the history of the painting.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> For a concise biography of Finley, see Leigh E. Schmidt, “Samuel Finley,” *American National Biography*, vol. 7, eds. John A. Garraty and Marc C. Carnes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 933–34. See also Donald Drew Egbert, *Princeton Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 34–35.

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<sup>2</sup> Founded by William Tennent (1673–1746) circa 1726, the Log College was the first theological seminary serving Presbyterians in North America and the training ground of many of the evangelical Protestant ministers who played a role in the eighteenth-century religious revival known as the Great Awakening. For more on Tennent and the Log College, see Archibald Alexander, *Biographical Sketches of the Founder and Principal Alumni of the Log College* (Princeton, NJ: J. T. Robinson, 1845).

<sup>3</sup> There are many connections between the Log College and the College of New Jersey, which was established in 1746 under the guidance of the Presbyterian minister Jonathan Dickinson (1688–1747). Tennent and Finley both served as founding trustees of the College, along with fellow Log College student Samuel Blair (1741–1818). Alexander Leitch, *A Princeton Companion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 291–92. For more on the early history of the College of New Jersey, later Princeton University, see John Maclean, *History of the College of New Jersey, From Its Origin in 1746 to the Commencement of 1854* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1877).

<sup>4</sup> Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*, 181–82.

<sup>5</sup> The institution—known at that time as Princeton College—was forming a collection of portraits of its former presidents. See “Portraits of Our Former Presidents,” *Nassau Literary Magazine* 27 (June 1870): 64.

<sup>6</sup> Hesselius’s principal biographer, Richard K. Doud, asserts that the only material that survives to help document his activities are one letter, his will, inventory, an account book, and a few real estate transactions. Richard K. Doud, “John Hesselius, Maryland Limner,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 5 (1969): 140, n. 31. Other useful sources on Hesselius and his career are Theodore Bolton and George C. Groce, Jr., “John Hesselius: An Account of His Life and the First Catalogue of His Portraits,” *Art Quarterly* 2 (Winter 1939): 76–91; Louise Burroughs, “An Inscription by John Hesselius on a Portrait in The Metropolitan Museum of Art,” *Art Quarterly* 4 (Spring 1941): 110–14; Richard Keith Doud, “John Hesselius: His Life and Work,” (Master’s thesis, University of Delaware, 1963); Doud, “John Hesselius, Maryland Limner,” 129–53; and Roland E. Fleischer, “Three Recently Discovered Portraits by John Hesselius,” *Antiques* 119 (1981): 666–68.

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Finley Breese Morse to William Peronneau Finley, February 1, 1869, Morse, *Letterbook*—1 December 1869 to 23 June 1870, retrieved from the Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov/item/mmorse000084](http://www.loc.gov/item/mmorse000084), accessed September 22, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Morse to Finley, April 16, 1869, Morse, *Letterbook*.

<sup>9</sup> Morse to Edward Lind, November 22, 1869, *ibid*.

<sup>10</sup> See John Caldwell and Oswaldo Rodriguez Rock, *American Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Vol. I: A Catalogue of Works by Artists Born by 1815* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 190–92. See also “Death of Prof. Morse’s Daughter,” *New York Times*, December 9, 1885, 8.

<sup>11</sup> See *A Record of the Members of the Kappa Alpha Theta Fraternity and a City and Town Directory* (New York: A. H. Kellogg, 1892), 71; and *Circular and Catalogue of Union College, Sixty-Ninth Year, First Term 1863* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1863), 32. For Lind studying in Paris and painting in New York, see also Morse to Finley, May 16, 1870, Morse, *Letterbook*. I have found no other documentation of Lind’s time in Paris, but the period he was there, from 1865 to 1869, corresponds with the opening of Bonnat’s private atelier in 1865. H. Barbara Weinberg has written that “Bonnat’s greatest interest as a teacher of Americans—some five dozen in all—relates to the years between 1865 and 1882, when his independent atelier flourished and when his own style still departed noticeably from the strictly academic. Because the duration of his studio coincided with the first flush of postwar American interest in Parisian training, he seems to have had an unusually high proportion of energetic and successful American pupils.” Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 164.

<sup>12</sup> See Morse to A. B. Cornell, October 19, 1869; and Morse to Charles Walker Lind, November 10, 1869, both Morse, *Letterbook*. It is unclear exactly when Lind lived with Morse, but a subsequent letter says he lived with him for “part of the summer.” Morse to Finley, May 16, 1870, *ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> Morse to Edward Lind, November 22, 1869, *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> Morse to Edward and Susan Lind, March 22, 1870, *ibid*.

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<sup>16</sup> Morse to the Honorable Collector of the Port of New York, April 21, 1870, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Morse to William P. Finley, May 16, 1870, *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> See Burroughs, “An Inscription by John Hesselius on a Portrait in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.”

<sup>22</sup> See Art Association of Indianapolis, Outgoing Memorandum, Shipping and Delivery Order dated June 29, 1964; Intermuseum Conservation Association, Intermuseum Laboratory, Report of Condition, dated July 27, 1964; Intermuseum Conservation Association, Intermuseum Laboratory, Proposal for Treatment dated 1964; and Art Association of Indianapolis, Incoming Memorandum of Objects Received dated January 8, 1965, all located in the object file, Indianapolis Museum of Art.

<sup>23</sup> See Herald F. Stout, *The Clan Finley. A Condensed Genealogy of the Finley Family at Home and Abroad* (Dover, OR: Eagle Press, 1940).