

## “Our dear Father:” Investigating the Portrait of Harmanus Ten Eyck

Matthew Skic



Figure 1, *Harmanus Ten Eyck*, Ezra Ames, Albany, New York; 1800–29. Oil on canvas, 1959.1393 A,B Winterthur Museum, Gift of Henry Francis du Pont

In 1828, Albany merchant, Harmanus Ten Eyck passed away in his home on North Market Street. One of his children recorded his death in the family’s bible: “Departed this life January 27, 1828 on Sabbath afternoon at half past 4 O’clock, our dear Father Harmanus Ten Eyck aged 78 years 11 days.” About twenty years earlier, Ten Eyck commissioned his portrait, an act that left a record of his likeness and a legacy for his heirs. His death posed a classic family problem. Only one of his children could inherit his portrait, but how would the rest of his children preserve the memories of their father? Two of Ten Eyck’s children ordered copies of the painting, all of which have survived. As subsequent generations inherited these portraits, their meanings changed. Ten Eyck’s descendants could not remember him as their “dear Father.” The portraits became a sign of lineage.<sup>1</sup>

An object’s significance changes over time because its uses and meanings depend on the people and events connected to it throughout its existence. Since his death, Ten Eyck’s portrait has been exhibited, published, sold, and become the subject of historical inquiry. The painting is tangible evidence of affections for an affluent patriarch, evidence of an artist’s talent, an illustration for the history of a cosmopolitan city, the growth of antiquarian interests, and the popularity of American genealogy at the end of the nineteenth century (Figure 1). Inspired by the version at the Winterthur Museum, this paper explores the creation, inheritance, and sale of the Ten Eyck portrait to understand its meaning. Its changing significance makes the portrait an historical document of how families preserve and transform memory.<sup>2</sup>

### Creation

Born into a well-established Albany family, Harmanus Ten Eyck was a wealthy and active citizen in the city. He had a large family of his own and decided to spend a significant amount of money to have his portrait painted. He commissioned Ezra Ames, a prominent local artist, to capture his likeness at some point during the first two decades

of the nineteenth century. The portrait recorded Ten Eyck's position as the head of his prosperous family, but it was also evidence of Albany's growing sophistication as the State Capitol and gateway to Upstate New York.

The 1770s through the 1790s represented the prime of Ten Eyck's life at a time when Upstate New York was growing rapidly. He had a strong sense of family and community. Born in 1750, Harmanus represented the fifth generation of Ten Eycks in North America, and the fourth to live in Albany. Like his father, Harmanus made his living as a merchant involved in the city's extensive trade via the Hudson River. Albany's location at the northern end of the navigable portion of the Hudson and its development as a center for the fur trade had long before made shipping significant in the city's commercial life. Ten Eyck also engaged himself in civic and political activities. At various times, he served as an Albany County loan officer, a "chimney viewer," a firemaster, and a city elections inspector. He even contributed twenty pounds to help found Union College in Schenectady.<sup>3</sup>

Harmanus made his own contributions to the Ten Eyck family tree. After their marriage in 1776, he and his wife, Margaret Bleecker (1755-1834), produced ten children between 1777 and 1798. Four of their ten children passed away before the age of eight. Three of the six surviving children married and had families of their own. Anna (1783-1851) and Herman (1793-1861) lived with their respective families in Albany, while Catharine (1798-1865) and her husband made their home in Cazenovia, NY, about 115 miles west of the city. Catalina (1778-1855), Jacob (1781-1872), and Margaret (1781-1853) remained single.<sup>4</sup>

Based on the version at Winterthur, Ten Eyck's portrait is a fine example of portraiture from the early 1800s. It is unsigned but scholars attribute it to Ezra Ames (1768-1836), the best portraitist in Albany at that time. Ames incorporated minute details in Ten Eyck's facial features to capture his likeness. Although there is no known record of how much Ten Eyck paid for his portrait, Ames charged between twenty and thirty dollars for similar works. This price is comparable to the cost of a mahogany dining table made in New York City at the turn of the century. Lower-priced options did exist. Artist Louis Lemet charged eight dollars for full scale portraits in crayon. Joseph Wood, the partner of John Wesley Jarvis, charged ten to twenty dollars for miniatures and portraits during his temporary stay in Albany. Winterthur's version of the portrait remains in its original gilt frame. Frames of this size and style were an expensive addition to any painting. Searches through city newspapers show that at least six picture frame wholesalers and retailers operated in Albany during this period, offering fancy carved and gilt frames. Ames also retailed gilt frames to accompany his portraits often charging twenty dollars. Ames's work represented an expensive option for a portrait in Albany, but one that the affluent Ten Eyck could afford. Such a portrait displayed his wealth and social rank, but it also reflected his role as a patriarch of an old and proud Dutch family rooted to an important crossroad of a Yankee diaspora.<sup>5</sup>

The fine quality and gilt frame of the version at Winterthur reflected Albany's cosmopolitan character at the beginning of the 1800s. An Irish traveler described the city during his short stay there in 1796: "The inhabitants of this place, a few years ago, were almost entirely of Dutch extraction; but now strangers are flocking to it from all quarters, as there are few places in America more advantageously situated for commerce." The people connected to the creation of the Ten Eyck portrait were some of those domestic and international newcomers. As a young artist, Ezra Ames moved to Albany from Massachusetts to take advantage of the market for portraits. Within a few years, Ames made a name for himself painting members of the city's prominent families: Stephen Van Rensselaer, Elkanah Watson, and George Clinton. Other portraitists in the city included French-born painters such as Thomas Gimbrede, Louis Lemet, and L. Aubineau who advertised their talents in Albany newspapers. All of them had access to imported pigments, oils, and brushes sold by art supplies merchants like William and John Fryer who owned a shop on Court Street. Frame wholesalers J. & J. Del Vecchio, Italian immigrants, sold fancy gilt frames from their warehouse on State Street like the one this portrait is set in. Even before the Erie Canal increased the city's commercial standing after 1825, affluent people of Albany did not need to travel far for quality portraiture. While Ten Eyck was a member of a well-established Albany family, the people and materials involved in the creation of his portrait were relatively new.<sup>6</sup>

Ten Eyck commissioned his portrait at some point during the first two decades of the nineteenth century as he entered the late stage of his life. Displayed in his home, the portrait reminded family members and guests of an affectionate patriarch and parent. As a record of his legacy of prosperity, it was meant to be inherited by one of his children. Art historian Margaretta Lovell claims that family culture provided the incentive to sit for or purchase portraits. They projected the sitter "as furnisher of [his] personal and family material landscape" to his "immediate circle." The facts that he had adult children and inheritable wealth, influenced Ten Eyck's desire for his portrait. Once he passed away and one of his children inherited the painting, its meaning shifted.<sup>7</sup>

### **Inheritance**

Inheritance not only involves the physical transfer of objects and wealth, but also the symbolic transformation of a legacy from one generation to the next. Harmanus's death in 1828 altered the portrait's circumstances. Over the 90

years following Ten Eyck's death, his portrait became an object of reverence, history, and genealogy as it was inherited by subsequent generations. During those decades, Ten Eyck's descendants copied, exhibited, and published his portrait.

Inheriting a portrait differed from receiving money, land, or objects such as tables and chairs. Unlike a portrait, these objects could be split up among heirs. Ten Eyck's portrait could only go to one of his six children. It is difficult to determine who inherited the original version, but it is clear that Jacob, Harmanus's oldest son, did not receive it. A year and a half after Harmanus's death, Ezra Ames's account book entry from July 24, 1829 reads, "Mr. J. Ten Eyck Dr. / To painting a Copy of his fathers portrait." Jacob commissioned the copy, although the price he paid is illegible. Unmarried, Jacob turned forty-eight years old that year, and like his father, made his living as a merchant in Albany. Jacob left a wealthy estate after his death in 1872. He must have revered his father as the "furnisher" of his affluence. Ames probably made a second copy for one of Ten Eyck's other children, accounting for the existence of the three iterations of the portrait. These copies were symbols of the Ten Eyck children's pedigree and marks of respect.<sup>8</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, one of the three versions of the portrait held not only family significance, but also antiquarian value. From July 5 through July 24, 1886, a number of Albany citizens loaned their pictures, paintings, and statues for an exhibition on the second story of the Albany Academy (Figure 2). In celebration of the city's bicentennial, this display featured portraits of historic figures and other paintings by Albany's bygone artists. For one of his contributions, Jacob H. Ten Eyck (1833-1898), Harmanus's grandson, decided to loan the portrait of his grandfather that he owned as an example of Ezra Ames's artistry. As admirers of art, Jacob and his wife Matilda Bleecker played a major part in organizing the exhibition by loaning a large portion of their personal collection. Following the display's popular success, Jacob helped to found the Albany Historical and Art Society which evolved into the Albany Institute of History and Art. The Ten Eyck portrait showcased Ezra Ames as a successful, well-known Albany artist from earlier in the century. For the first time in its existence, the portrait entered into public view. In this context, it represented the artist as much as the sitter.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 2, *Interior View of the Art Gallery at the Albany Bicentennial Loan Exhibition*, The Notman Photographic Co. Limited, Albany, New York, 1886. Albumen print on card, Ser50B1num33 Albany Institute of History & Art Library, Main photograph collection.

Ten Eyck's portrait also gained meaning as a genealogical object. At the end of the nineteenth century, Margaret Ten Eyck Pruyn (1868-1941), Harmanus's great-granddaughter, inherited one of the three versions. Margaret had an interest in her genealogy and ancestors, holding membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution, founded in 1890 (Figure 3). In 1917, the Colonial Dames of the State of New York published the book, *Genealogical Records*:



*Manuscript Entries of births, deaths and marriages, taken from family bibles 1581-1917.* Reprinted in this book are the notations included in Harmanus Ten Eyck's family bible, owned by Margaret. Along with these notations is a photograph of the Harmanus Ten Eyck portrait she owned (Figure 4). This photograph served as a genealogical illustration, connecting the name of Margaret's ancestor with an image. Her interest in genealogy prompted the publication of the portrait and bible notations, perhaps so other family members could access the information.<sup>10</sup>

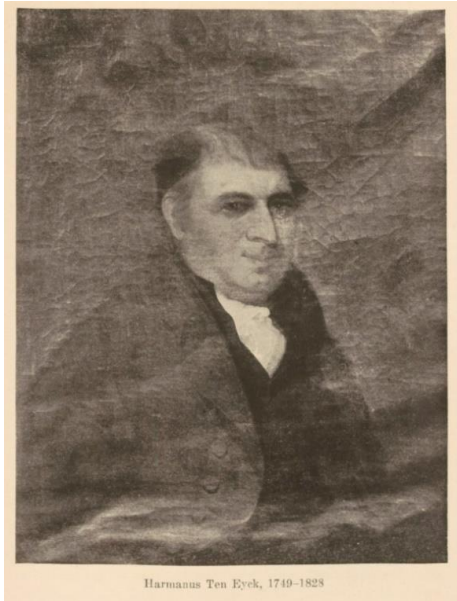


Figure 4, *Genealogical Records: Manuscript Entries of births, deaths and marriages, taken from family bibles 1581-1917* [plate opposite p. 214], Jeanie F.J. Robison and Henrietta C. Bartlett, eds., New York, New York: The Colonial Dames of the State of New York, 1917. CS68 R66 Printed Book and Periodical Collection, Winterthur Library



Figure 3, Dressed in a Dutch costume, Margaret Ten Eyck Pruyn is standing in the back row, second from the left. *Albany, New York, Tercentenary Pageant*, Albany, New York, 1924. B & W print mounted on cardboard, xfn00015, Albany Public Library, History Collection

Genealogical research and societies rose in popularity during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The publication of the Harmanus Ten Eyck portrait connected the painting to this national phenomenon. During this period, both men and women formed societies such as the DAR, the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, the Sons of the American Revolution, the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. American genealogical societies and publications found their beginnings in early nineteenth century New England, but following the Civil War and the nation's Centennial celebrations, interest in history expanded. Tracing one's lineage to the founding of the United States became popular as many people worried about the loss of

American identity as increased immigration altered local populations, urban development effaced early landscapes, and the franchise expanded to include former slaves and people of color. The DAR and the Dames recorded, preserved, and promoted the stories of the men and women who made contributions to the founding of the United States. Membership required tracing ancestry to those founders, excluding those who did not have such roots. By way of ancestry, members laid claim to the colonial and revolutionary past of the nation. The portrait of Harmanus Ten Eyck helped Margaret to clarify her lineage.<sup>11</sup>

As the portrait moved from one generation to the next, its meaning shifted. The fact that two copies were made suggests the esteem Harmanus's children had for their father soon after his death. Later in the century, subsequent owners of the three versions made decisions which changed the significance of the portrait. Through public display, Jacob H. Ten Eyck associated his copy with the art of Ezra Ames. Margaret Ten Eyck Pruyn considered the copy she owned to be an illustration of her genealogical identity and had it published. Through the years, the three versions did not leave the ownership of the Ten Eyck family. That would change by the mid-twentieth century.

### Sale

When dividing an estate, heirs may elect to monetize family assets. In the case of Harmanus Ten Eyck, his descendants decided to sell two of the three versions of his portrait in Cazenovia, New York, at the middle of the twentieth century. In 1947, Henry Francis du Pont (1880-1969) purchased one version to hang in Winterthur, his home and future museum. The Albany Institute of History and Art (AIHA) acquired their version four years later. The third iteration remains with the Ten Eyck family (Figure 5). At about the same time, the Ten Eyck portrait became an object of historical inquiry.<sup>12</sup>

Similar to when it first entered public view in 1886, Ten Eyck's portrait received renewed attention due to its connection to Ezra Ames. Art historians Theodore Bolton and Irwin F. Courtelyou briefly discussed the three Ten Eyck portraits in their book *Ezra Ames of Albany*, published in 1955. The book provides a biographical sketch of Ames, transcriptions of his account books, and a catalog of his works. They concluded that the versions at Winterthur and the AIHA may have been painted by Ames. Courtelyou's discussions with Winterthur curator Joseph Downs in 1952 reveal that Downs hesitated in labelling Winterthur's iteration as an Ames painting. He based his hesitation on the "canvas and pigment," but did not provide any more details. Since the publishing of this book, the Ten Eyck portrait has received little scholarly attention.<sup>13</sup>

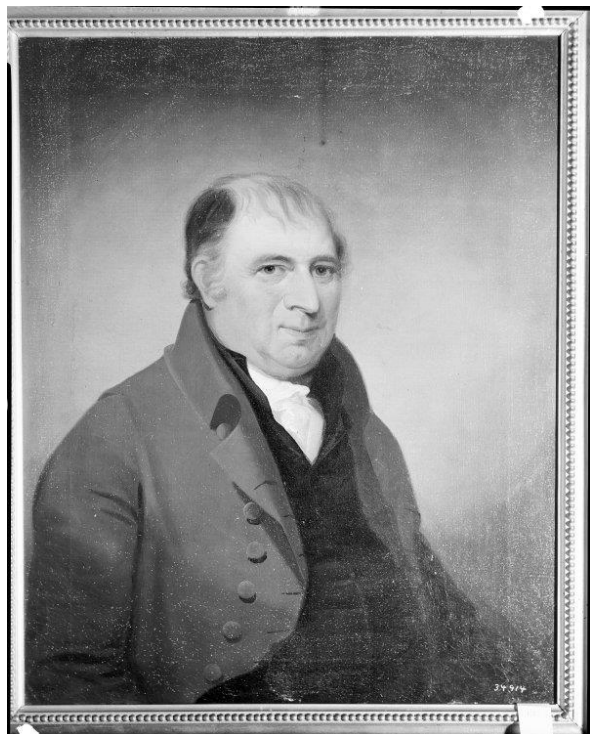


Figure 5, *Harmanus Ten Eyck*, Ezra Ames, Albany, New York; 1800–29. Oil on canvas, 34914 Frick Digital Image Archive, Collection of Mrs. Arthur W. Butler

The sale of two versions of the Ten Eyck portrait led to its changed significance. Henry Francis du Pont purchased one iteration because Ten Eyck was his maternal great-great-grandfather. The AIHA purchased their version because of its Albany provenance. In 1959, du Pont's portrait became an accessioned object of the Winterthur Museum, which he established eight years earlier. As accessioned objects, Ten Eyck descendants can no longer inherit the two versions like their ancestors did. Their sale transformed them into collectables and cultural artifacts with potential use for scholarship on Ezra Ames, nineteenth-century Albany, American genealogy, and the Ten Eyck family. Only one version of the portrait continues to be held by family members.<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusion

The portrait of Harmanus Ten Eyck tells stories about specific people and broader events. Its significance changed, moved, increased, and decreased as it was copied and inherited. The portrait records Ten Eyck's prosperity, Ezra Ames's talents as an artist, the history of cosmopolitan Albany, Jacob Ten Eyck's affections for his father, the later Jacob's antiquarian and artistic interests, and Margaret Ten Eyck Pruyn's involvement in the broader popularity of American genealogy. It reveals how families preserve and transform memory across generations. Ten Eyck's portrait is not just an illustration of the past, but a tangible agent in the continuing study of historical people and events.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanie F.J. Robison and Henrietta C. Bartlett, eds., *Genealogical Records: Manuscript Entries of births, deaths and marriages, taken from family bibles 1581-1917* (New York: The Colonial Dames of the State of New York, 1917), 215; The three iterations include one at the Winterthur Museum, one at the Albany Institute of History and Art, and one in a private collection.

<sup>2</sup> This paper draws upon the larger arguments of Jules David Prown about material culture and its significance to the study of history, see Jules David Prown, *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 221.

<sup>3</sup> Berthold Fernow, ed., *Calendar of Wills on File and Recorded in the Offices of the Clerk of the Court of Appeals, of the County Clerk at Albany, and of the Secretary of State, 1626-1836* (New York: Colonial Dames of the State of New York, 1896), 325; S.V. Talcott, *Genealogical Notes of New York and New England Families* (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1883), 228 and 240-241; James Sullivan, ed., *Minutes of the Albany Committee of Correspondence, 1775-1778, Vol. 1* (Albany: The State University of New York, 1923), 617, accessed September 20, 2014, Internet Archive; *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New York, Fifteenth Session*, (New York: Francis Childs and John Swaine, 1792), 10, accessed August 19, 2014, Google Books; Stefan Bielinski, "Union College Subscribers- 1794," Colonial Albany Social History Project, November 9, 2011, accessed September 20, 2014, [http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/research\\_collections/research/history/albany/doc/1794sl.html](http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/research_collections/research/history/albany/doc/1794sl.html).

<sup>4</sup> Talcott, 240-241.

<sup>5</sup> The technical qualities and style of the portrait reflect similar examples of Ames's portraits. His attention to detail in the faces he painted conveys the accents of his sitters' skin tones and darker shadows of cleanly shaved cheeks and chins. Similarities also appear in the lie of coat lapels and collars. Similar portraits include *Philip Van Cortlandt* (c.1809), *Self Portrait* (n.d.), *Elkanah Watson* (1804), and *Mr. Ames* (n.d.); Nancy H. Liddle, *The Faces of the City: Albany portraits from Three Centuries* (Albany: University Art Gallery of the University at Albany, State University of New York, 1986), 14; Charles F. Montgomery, *American Furniture: The Federal Period* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2001), 23; "Physiognotrace," *Albany Centinel*, October 18, 1805, accessed September 14, 2014, America's Historical Newspapers; "Physiognotrace," *Albany Gazette*, August 25, 1803, accessed September 14, 2014, America's Historical Newspapers; According to Winterthur's paintings conservator, Mary McGinn, the aligned nail holes on the strainer and frame suggest the originality of the frame to the portrait. Mary McGinn, conversation with author, August 25, 2014; For Ames's frame prices see, Theodore Bolton and Irwin F. Cortelyou, *Ezra Ames of Albany* (New York: The New York Historical Society, 1955), 182.

<sup>6</sup> Isaac Weld, Jr., *Travels through the States of North America and the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, during the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797* (London: John Stockdale, 1799), 267-273, accessed November 3, 2014, Internet Archive; Bolton and Cortelyou, 217, 300, and 308; "Painting & Engraving," *Otsego Herald*, February 6, 1800, accessed August 31, 2014, America's Historical Newspapers; "Paint, Oil and Glass," *Albany Gazette*, September 15, 1806, accessed October 5, 2014, America's Historical Newspapers; "J. & J. Del Vecchio," *Albany Gazette*, June 21, 1804, accessed October 5, 2014, America's Historical Newspapers.

<sup>7</sup> Robison and Bartlett, eds., 214-216; Margaretta M. Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 6 and 9; Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, "'Staring Likenesses': Portraiture in Rural New England, 1790-1850" In *Meet Your Neighbors: New England Portraits, Painters, & Society, 1790-1850*, edited by Caroline F. Sloat. Sturbridge, MA: Old Sturbridge Village, 1992. New

England, 1790-1850,” in *Meet Your Neighbors: New England Portraits, Painters, & Society, 1790-1850*, ed. Caroline F. Sloat (Sturbridge, MA: Old Sturbridge Village, 1992), 31.

<sup>8</sup> Thirty dollars is the amount Ames charged for a single portrait in 1829, see Bolton and Cortelyou, 190 and 283; “A Large Estate,” *Cazenovia Republican*, October 24, 1872, accessed November 4, 2014, [cazenovia.advantage-preservation.com](http://cazenovia.advantage-preservation.com); Lovell, 118 and 132; Talcott, 241; Robison and Bartlett, eds., 215.

<sup>9</sup> Jacob probably inherited the portrait from his father Herman, Harmanus’s only son to have children; *Catalogue of Albany’s Bicentennial Loan Exhibition at the Albany Academy, July 5 to July 24, 1886* (Albany: Weed, Parsons & Co., 1886), 114, accessed October 1, 2014, Internet Archive; Martha J. Lamb, ed., *Magazine of American History with Notes and Queries Vol. XVII* (New York: Historical Publication Co., 1887), 266, accessed November 2, 2014, Google Books; Tammis K. Groft and Mary Alice Mackay, eds, *Albany Institute of History & Art: 200 Years of Collecting* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1998), 25.

<sup>10</sup> Confirmed through visual comparison, figure 4 depicts the version of the portrait which now in the collection of the Albany Institute of History and Art. That version is on long term loan to the Ten Broeck Mansion, headquarters of the Albany County Historical Association. W. Douglas McCombs, email message to author, January 6, 2015; Robison and Bartlett, eds., 214-218; Mary Jane Seymour, *Lineage Book of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution* (Harrisburg, PA: Harrisburg Publishing Company, 1899), 82, accessed November 4, 2014, Internet Archive; *Register of the Colonial Dames of the State of New York 1893-1913*, (New York: The Colonial Dames of the State of New York, 1913), 7, accessed November 2, 2014, Internet Archive.

<sup>11</sup> Francois Weil, “John Farmer and the Making of American Genealogy,” *The New England Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (September 2007): 414-415, accessed October 27, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20474555>; *Constitution and Eligibility Lists of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America* (Baltimore: Guggenheimer, Weil & Co, 1896), 6, accessed November 2, 2014, Internet Archive; For more on American genealogy at the end of the nineteenth century see, Francois Weil, *Family Trees: A History of Genealogy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4-5 and 143-145.

<sup>12</sup> Anna Foster Robinson Butler (1889-1969) of New York, also known as Mrs. Arthur W. Butler, is the last known owner of the version that remains in family hands. She is one of Ten Eyck’s great-granddaughters. Butler inherited this version from her cousin, “Mrs. Burr Wendell,” referring to Emily Lentilhon Smith Wendell (1857-1931), see Bolton and Cortelyou, 282-83; “Obituary 1—no title,” *New York Times*, August 30, 1969, accessed December 1, 2014, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>13</sup> Bolton and Cortelyou, 282-83 and 352; Irwin F. Cortelyou to Joseph Downs, January 15, 1952, Folder 1959.1393, Registrar’s Office, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE; Joseph Downs to Irwin F. Cortelyou, February 21, 1952, Folder 1959.1393, Registrar’s Office, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE.

<sup>14</sup> A pencil inscription on the back of Winterthur’s version reads “Mr[s?]. [S or T]. E. Wendell 1873” likely referring to Ten Eyck Wendell (1857-1932), Harmanus’s great-grandson, who lived in Cazenovia, see Conservation File for 1959.1393, n.d., Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE; Robert H. Palmiter to Henry F. du Pont, August 29, 1947, Folder 1959.1393, Registrar’s Office, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE; Along with the portrait, du Pont purchased a Ten Eyck family mourning needlework, see Receipt, Robert H. Palmiter Antiques, October 5, 1947, Folder 1959.1393, Registrar’s Office, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE

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