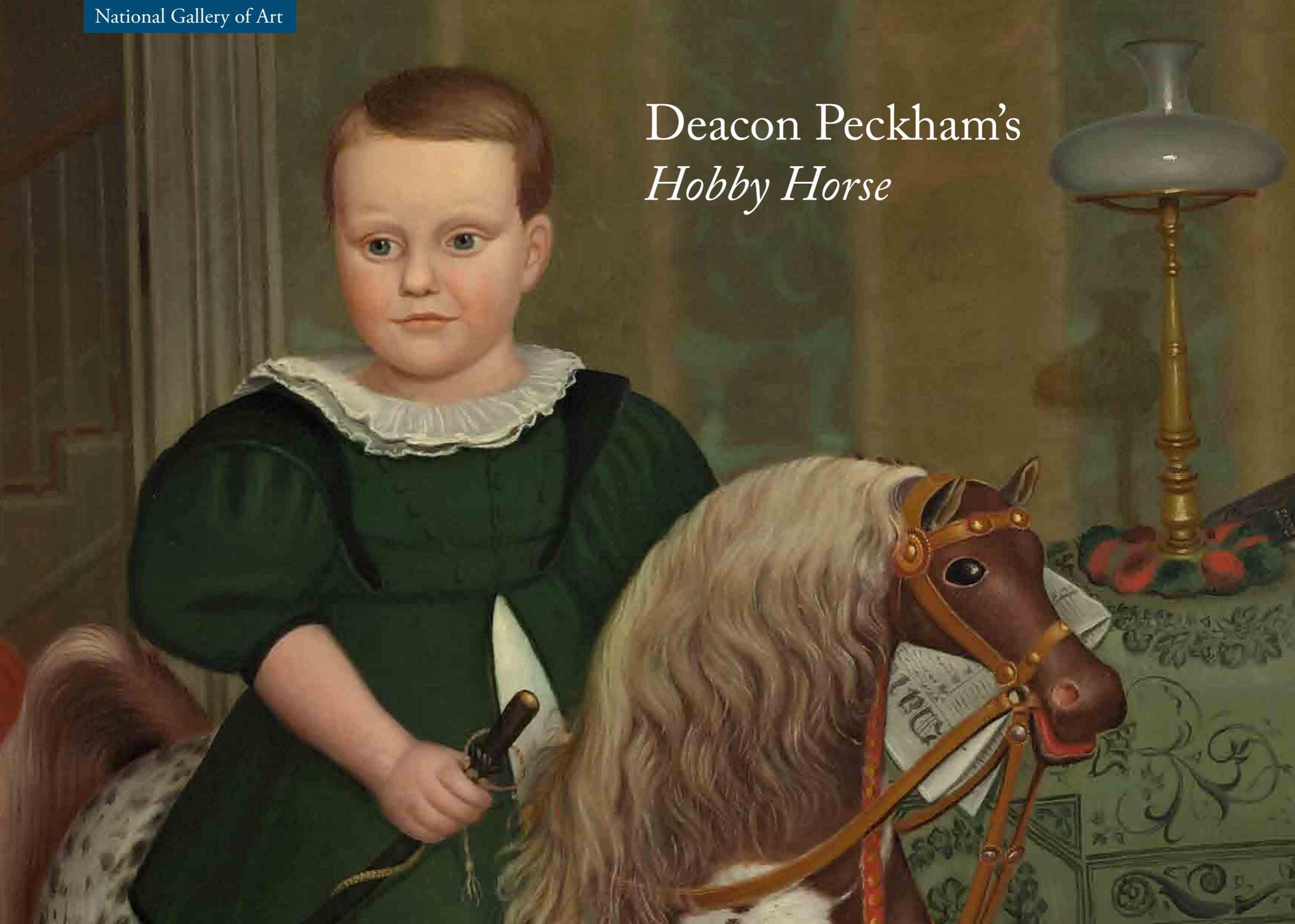


Deacon Peckham's
Hobby Horse





Deacon Peckham's *Hobby Horse*

Deborah Chotner

National Gallery of Art, Washington
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Contents

- 4 Robert Peckham and His Portraits of Children
- 15 Exhibited Works
- 34 Chronology
- 44 Glossary
- 46 Selected Bibliography

Robert Peckham and His Portraits of Children

In the 1830s and 1840s Robert Peckham (1785–1877) created a group of fascinating children’s portraits. This exhibition represents the first time that a selection of them has been brought together before a national audience.¹ It includes nine portraits of children from Massachusetts along with a rare nineteenth-century rocking horse similar to the one depicted in Peckham’s most engaging painting, *The Hobby Horse* (no. 9).

Born in Petersham, Massachusetts, on September 10, 1785, Peckham appears to have spent most of his long life in the central part of the state (see [CHRONOLOGY](#)). In 1813 he married Ruth Wolcott Sawyer, who eventually bore him nine children; they lived first in Northampton, where Peckham advertised his services as an ornamental and sign painter, and then in Bolton.² He clearly saw himself as a *portrait* painter early on, for he placed this descriptor first in an 1814 advertisement listing his services. Yet his only training appears to have been a few months in 1809 that he spent studying with the somewhat more established Ethan



fig 1 Robert Peckham, *Westminster Village*, 1831, oil on board, Forbush Memorial Library, Westminster, Massachusetts

Allen Greenwood (1779–1856) in the town of Westminster.³ There Peckham lived for most of his life, beginning with his purchase of land in 1820 (fig. 1).

Peckham was appointed deacon of Westminster's First Congregational Church in 1828, a post he would hold for fourteen years. He retained the title of deacon throughout his life, even during years of controversy and estrangement from his church stemming from disagreement among the members concerning the extent of their participation in abolitionist activities. Peckham was deeply committed to the cause. According to his youngest daughter, the deacon's home served as part of the Underground Railroad.⁴ Despite residing in the nearby city of Worcester between 1849 and 1863, Peckham retained his Westminster property and connections and remained a prominent citizen there. In 1868, on the occasion of the dedication of the memorial to Westminster's Civil War dead (one of Peckham's sons, Samuel Henry, served the Union and died at the infamous Andersonville Prison), the elderly Peckham delivered a tribute in verse. He died in Westminster on June 29, 1877.

Very few of the more than fifty portraits believed to be by Peckham are signed or otherwise documented, so attributions necessarily have been made on the basis of style and geographic or familial connections. The Forbush Memorial Library

fig 2 Robert Peckham, *John Greenleaf Whittier*, 1833, oil on canvas, John Greenleaf Whittier Homestead, Haverhill, Massachusetts



in Westminster has several likenesses of Peckham's neighbors and fellow townsmen that are similar to one another in execution and attributed to the artist by tradition and family history. Other works, such as Peckham's portrait of the poet John Greenleaf Whittier (fig. 2), are documented through writings. Whittier, whom Peckham admired for his abolitionist convictions, posed for the artist in 1833 but later rather unkindly commented, "I only recall sitting for him two or three times, but how it looked I have no idea. If it was a good picture, it was a miracle, for the Deacon was eminently artless."⁵ Many stylistic characteristics of Whittier's portrait — the strong, single-direction lighting emphasizing the subject's shining forehead, the fluid handling of the sitter's hair, and the placement of highlights in his eyes — are found in unsigned works attributed to Peckham. While the artist's style may have evolved somewhat over the years, his works are recognizable for their distinctive quality of hard light, their sometimes "too truthful" naturalism, their crispness, and their meticulous attention to detail. Peckham's adult portraits are generally subdued (save for the colorful ribbons and jewelry of some female sitters) and are usually set against dark, featureless backgrounds. His relatively few portraits of children, however, are often more colorful and complex with detailed interior settings. All the children represented in these works lived within fifty miles of Westminster,

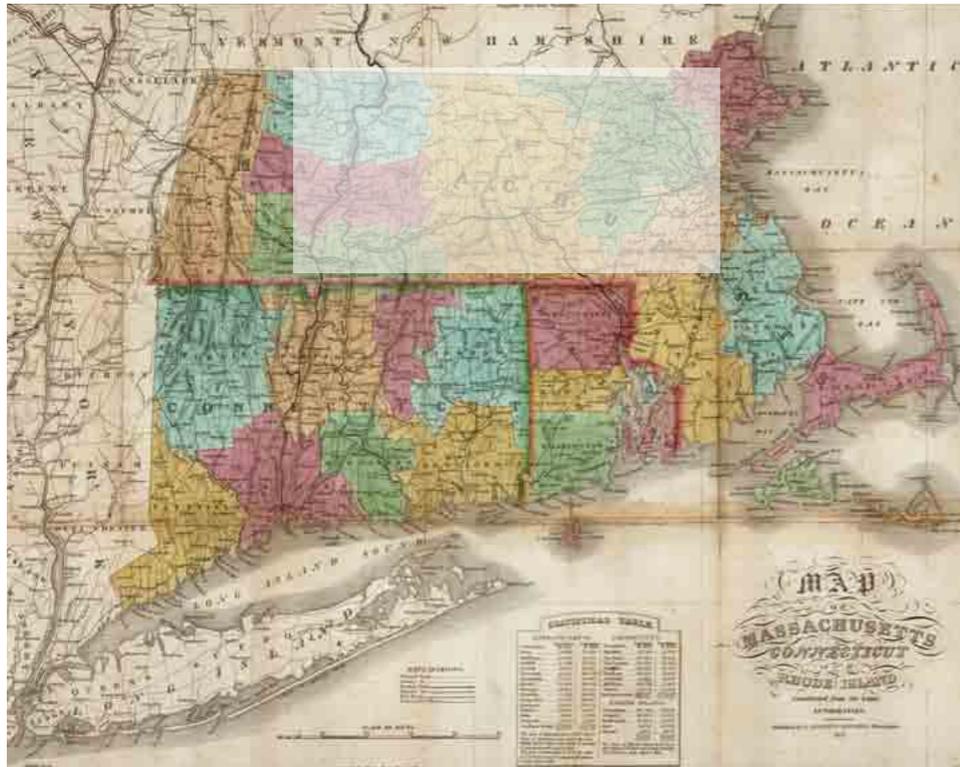
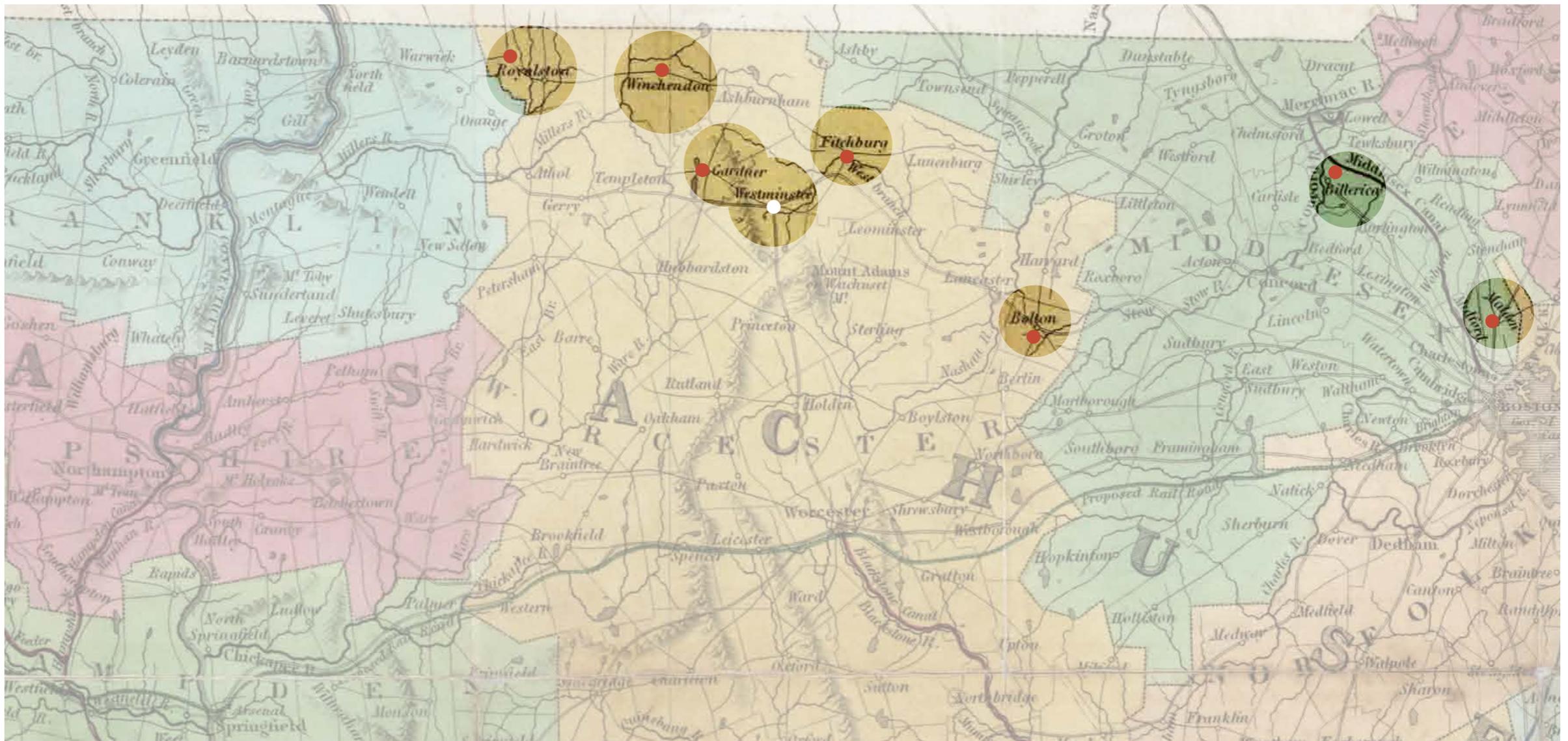


fig 3 See next page for detail of highlighted area showing Westminster and locations of Peckham's sitters.

Map of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island Constructed from the Latest Authorities. Published by S. Augustus Mitchell, Philadelphia, 1831, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, Copyright © 2010 Cartography Associates

several in directly adjacent towns (fig. 3). While the images make use of the same directional light, somewhat stiff poses, realistic (even unflattering) features, they are most arresting because of the direct gazes that connect subjects to viewer, their striking intensity, and the sense that the children are tightly enveloped within their environments.

The portraits were created in an era in which child-rearing manuals, such as Lydia Maria Child's *The Mother's Book* (1831), Lydia Sigourney's *Letters to Mothers* (1839), and Herman Humphrey's *Domestic Education* (1840) admonished parents to attend to the supreme importance of the home. Mothers, especially, were entrusted with the shaping of their children's moral and spiritual growth. The most effective training ground for such early instruction, it was felt, was the home—a haven from the potentially harmful influence of the outside world. In this same era, Bronson Alcott (1799–1888), a Massachusetts educator and transcendentalist, was observing and recording the behavior of his own children (including little Louisa May).⁶ Believing in the innate innocence of childhood (a firm rejection of the Calvinist doctrine of original sin), Alcott was eager to discover when and how moral decision-making was established in children and how the conscience took hold. In Peckham's depictions of his young subjects, with their sympathetic but unromanticized demeanors,



Detail of fig. 3, showing Westminster and locations of Peckham's sitters

we see beings whose containment within a domestic interior reflects their purposeful, cosseted upbringing, and consciously or unconsciously echoes the growing internalization of their reasoning and conscience. At any time these children might be angelic or mischievous, but in each case Peckham depicts them as specific individuals, rather than types.⁷

Peckham's forthright visual approach, in which everything before him is recorded with equal emphasis, situates him among those artists not academically trained. But his obvious command of texture and modeling and his strong sense of physiognomy distinguish him from most other naive artists. His particular brand of realism and attention to the accoutrements of a well-appointed home appealed to local families at a time when their material fortunes were on the rise.⁸ In the early decades of the nineteenth century small, primarily agricultural towns were expanding their industries and growing in population and prosperity each year. An 1832 history of Westminster reported that straw bonnets, chairs, cooperware (barrels, tubs, pails), and window blinds were made in the town. The author also noted sawmills, gristmills, and workshops with turning lathes and a [carding machine](#), located on the numerous streams in and around the village. Surprisingly, he concluded his description of "Agricultural and Manufactured Products" by relating that "Painting, of all kinds, including



no. 1, detail



no. 5, detail

portrait painting, is here carried on to some extent.”⁹ Writing later in the century, William Heywood recalled the growth of chair making in the adjacent town of Gardner (see *Rosa Heywood*, no. 5). Worcester County’s most important industry was governed by “the introduction of machinery into chair-shops, to be run with water or other power... the transition... may be regarded as having taken place substantially between the years 1830 and 1835, during which period the germs of most of the existing large chair establishments were first planted.”¹⁰

The children Peckham depicted came from families that both created and enjoyed the burgeoning wealth of consumer goods in antebellum New England, a number of which are visible in his paintings. In some portraits the artist goes beyond naturalistic perspective, tilting the floors to better show busily patterned, colorful carpets. Probably *ingrain carpets*, which were then widely available, they show a variety of bold designs, as seen in *The Children of Oliver Adams* (no. 1), *Rosa Heywood* (no. 5), *The Raymond Children* (no. 4), *The Farwell Children* (no. 6) and *The Hobby Horse* (no. 9).¹¹ Sometimes the carpets are paired with wallpaper in the background, which adds to the up-to-date character of the interior decor. Two of the portraits also include popular new lighting devices. The children are usually depicted in fine attire that would have been worn on special occasions rather than for play. However,

play is alluded to in these works with the inclusion of dolls, pull toys, and a remarkable rocking horse. Parents who could afford such luxuries had not only the means but also the desire to extend their material good fortune to the younger generation.

Of all the furnishings included in the interiors Peckham depicted, none is as striking as the hide-covered hobby horse for which the National Gallery's painting was named.¹² The boy and girl in the portrait are unidentified and the artist was unknown when the work was purchased by Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, who later gave it to the National Gallery.¹³ At the time the painting was made, around 1840 as judged by costumes and furnishings, no large manufacturers of rocking horses operated in the United States, although several major producers would arise in the next few decades. The steed in the painting provides no geographic or familial clues to the identity of the children portrayed with it. This [bow horse](#) was likely produced by a skilled craftsman with English or German training. To create it, animal hide (probably calfskin) was stretched and sewn or tacked over an expertly carved wooden body. Real horsehair was applied to form the mane and tail, large glass eyes were inserted, the base and rockers were decoratively painted and stenciled, and a colorful leather bridle was attached. Although antique rocking horses are still commonly found, few of the age, beauty, and complexity of



no. 9, detail

this example survive (see [no. 10](#) for a similar, slightly later example). Even in its time, it must have been a costly rarity.¹⁴

Rocking horses of various types and small pull-toy horses are included in a number of nineteenth-century portraits of children and were used in popular illustrations. As early as 1785, an advertisement promoted the “wholesome exercise” to be gained from rocking horses. Most often it is boys who are shown with them in paintings. Even when they are not on horseback, young males are often depicted holding whips to suggest the control they were expected to master, equestrian or otherwise. Portraits of girls were more likely to include dolls, flowers, or other attributes of more passive pursuits.¹⁵ Peckham’s placement of the siblings in *The Hobby Horse*, with the sister standing by, may reflect the childrens’ actual behavior, but it also recalls an image known from verse and illustrated on nineteenth-century ceramics presented as rewards to children.¹⁶ First published in London in 1812, Mary Belson (Elliott)’s verse reads: “Who saw me mount the Rocking Horse / And stood by to check its course / Lest her dear boy should get a toss? / MY SISTER.”¹⁷ The words are accompanied by an illustration of a girl, arm outstretched in caution, standing beside her exuberant younger brother. Peckham may have known this verse and image, but he also most likely portrayed the sister in the painting grasping the horse’s rocker in order to tie the two figures



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

no. 9, detail

no. 6, detail

no. 1, detail

to each other, and both siblings to the extraordinary object dominating the composition. The boy's central position emphasizes the societal importance of a male heir.

Portraits preserved likenesses for posterity while adding refinement to the household. In an era of childhood mortality they could also be a means of capturing the appearance of a beloved child lost too soon. Peckham's *The Children of Oliver Adams* (no. 1) and *The Farwell Children* (no. 6) each include an image of a child who had already died at the time the portrait was made. In *The Hobby Horse* (no. 9), the boy's sideways glance—disquieting and unusual in Peckham's work—might suggest that he did not actually pose in front of the artist, perhaps having already departed this world. By the end of the nineteenth century, many children were memorialized in photographs. At the moment when photography was introduced to the United States in 1839, Peckham and other portraitists competed with the quickly made but small and monochromatic daguerreotypes by producing vibrant, colorful likenesses in oil. Remarkable for their directness and immediacy, Peckham's portraits preserve indelible images of children in nineteenth-century America.

NOTES

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Nicholas Langhart, Margaret Howe-Soper, and Professor Karen Haney, in connection with the Forbush Memorial Library, Westminster. Information was also generously shared by folk art collector David Krashes and Peckham enthusiast Janice Peckham Wagner.

1 He was first researched and written about by local historians in his native town of Westminster, Massachusetts, and was later discussed in three journal articles. See histories by Bragdon and Howard, and articles by Johnson, Luckey, and Krashes in the [BIBLIOGRAPHY](#). A selection of paintings by Peckham was shown at the Fruitlands Museum, Harvard, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1983. No catalogue or checklist of the exhibition exists.

2 See Chronology for details.

3 Georgia Brady Baumgardner, "The Early Career of Ethan Allen Greenwood," *Itinerancy in New England* (Boston, 1986).

4 The other social cause to which the artist devoted himself was temperance. Peckham's small panels *The Woes of Liquor* and *The Happy Abstemious Family* are in the collection of the Worcester

(Massachusetts) Historical Museum.

5 John Greenleaf Whittier letter to Dr. Crowell, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Quoted in Krashes 1996, p. 44.

6 Charles Strickland, "A Transcendentalist Father: The Child-Rearing Practices of Bronson Alcott," *Perspectives in American History*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 5–73.

7 Working in about the same years, but in New Jersey and Baltimore, Oliver Tarbell Eddy (1799–1868) created images of children in shadowy interiors that share the same directness and seriousness of Peckham's portraits. Some intriguing images parallel to Peckham's were created by Eliza Goodridge (1798–1887), a Worcester miniaturist. Her watercolors on ivory include remarkable interior details. See *Lydia Stiles Foster* (c. 1838), *The Foster Children* (1838), and *Mary Macarty Stiles* (c. 1837) at the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester.

8 For a fascinating study of the New England economy at this time and a discussion of Peckham's place in it, see David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia, 2010). Jaffee notes

that Worcester County's population increased from 56,807 in 1790 to 95,313 in 1840 (192).

9 Charles Hudson, *A History of the Town of Westminster* (Mendon, MA, 1832). If there were portraitists in addition to Peckham working steadily in Westminster, they have not been identified.

10 William S. Heywood, *Gardner & Westminster Historical Sketches* (Boston, 1879).

11 Peckham is not alone in his emphasis of boldly patterned carpets, as evidenced by the work of Joseph Whiting Stock (1815–1855), Erastus Salisbury Field (1805–1900), and other American folk artists.

12 The term "hobby horse" is more conventionally applied to the toy that was a simple stick, for straddling, to which a horse-type head was attached. However, it can also describe a horse on rockers. Another meaning of the phrase is "a topic to which one constantly reverts." This is perhaps an apt description of Deacon Peckham's devotion to his chosen social causes.

13 It was Dale Johnson (see [BIBLIOGRAPHY](#)) who first proposed attributing *The Hobby Horse* to Peckham.

14 In addition to published sources such as Patricia Mullins, *The Rocking Horse: A History of Moving Toy Horses* (London, 1992), expertise was provided by longtime collector Dr. Edmund A. Weinberg and by rocking horse restorer Tony Stevenson (correspondence in author's file). I would also like to acknowledge Richard C. Nylander, who called my attention to the hide-covered horse in the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (now Historic New England) collection, and Margaret Konitzky (Historic New England), who arranged for me to see it. A similar horse, sold at Skinner, Inc., Sale 1274, October 27–28, 1989, is now unlocated.

15 For examples of this practice see tables 6, 7, and 19–23 in Jennifer A. Yunginger, *Is She or Isn't He? Identifying Gender in Folk Portraits of Children* (Sandwich, MA, 1995).

16 Peckham included such ceramics, Staffordshire children's mugs, in his portraits *John Adams* (1822), *Mary Edgell* (1830), and *The Raymond Children* (c. 1838, no. 4).

17 Noel Riley, *Gifts for Good Children: The History of Children's China, Part I, 1790–1890* (Ilminster, Somerset, United Kingdom, 1991), nos. 74, 77, and 78 (32–35).

Exhibited Works

1

Robert Peckham (1785–1877)

The Children of Oliver Adams, 1831

oil on canvas

68.6 × 53.3 cm (27 × 21 in.)

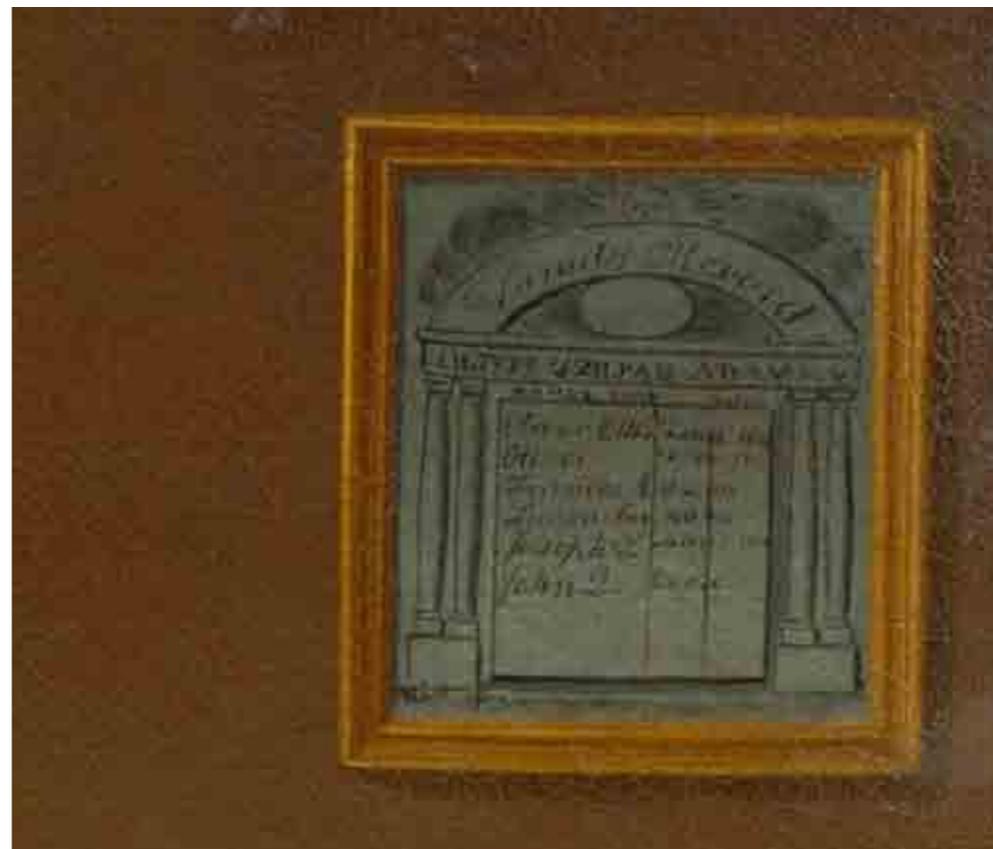
Charles N. Grichar



Oliver Adams was the husband of Peckham's sister-in-law, Zilpah Sawyer Adams. Peckham probably painted this portrait of his nieces and nephews on the sad occasion of the death of young Joseph Sawyer Adams in 1831. Depicted in red at left, Joseph (1828–1831) stands next to his sisters Frances Anne (1824–1838) and Laura Anne (1826–1897) and his baby brother John Quincy (1830–1837). The family record seen on the back wall lists not only those children pictured but others who had died. The portrait is thought to have been painted in the Adams home in Bolton, Massachusetts.

This transitional work for the artist makes use of a smaller format than his later paintings. Peckham posed the children

somewhat stiffly and generalized their features, but he also displayed a sympathetic understanding of his subjects, who gaze directly at the viewer. Peckham's close attention to furnishings is seen in the carefully depicted woodgrain of the cradle, the brightly colored carpet, the tack-decorated trunk bearing the initials "O. A.," and the family record hung on the wall (see detail below). As in several other works by Peckham, the children are posed before a door, but this one is opened to reveal a landscape outside the window, an unusual element for the artist. The scene would have been familiar to Peckham since he and his wife lived in Bolton from 1816 to 1819.



2 and 3

Robert Peckham (1785–1877)

Ruth Peckham and George Peckham, c. 1832

oil on board

47 × 38 cm (18½ × 15 in.) each

Margaret F. and William A. Wheeler III



no. 3, detail

Robert Peckham had ten children: nine with his first wife, Ruth Wolcott Sawyer (died 1842), and another child by his second wife, Mahalath Griggs. When these two portraits were purchased by the current owners' ancestor, they were noted as depicting two of Peckham's children. Judging from the apparent ages of the subjects, and from the "G. R. Peckham" lightly incised in the boy's collar (see detail at left), it appears that they are the likenesses of Peckham's daughter Ruth (born 1825) and son George Robert (born 1827).

While these portraits share many of the earmarks of Peckham's style, they have a greater sense of immediacy than his more formal works. There is a palpable affection communicated in the likenesses, and the sitters' faces are relaxed and slightly smiling. Unlike the grander, commissioned works that show children wearing their Sunday best, this pair is painted in plain, everyday



no. 2



no. 3

dress. One can imagine the artist requiring Ruth and George to pause in their chores or play, in order to come and pose. The canvases show evidence of having been folded over at some point, perhaps even while the paint was not quite dry, in order to accommodate smaller frames (the original dimensions have since been restored). Modest in size and almost certainly made for his family's pleasure (and perhaps to hone the artist's skills), these works demonstrate Peckham's special affinity for young subjects.



4

Robert Peckham (1785–1877)

The Raymond Children, c. 1838

oil on canvas

140.3 × 99 cm (55 ¼ × 39 in.)

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1966 (66.242.27)

Like *The Hobby Horse* (no. 9), this painting came to its present collection as the gift of renowned folk art collectors Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch. Without any idea of the works' authorship, the Garbisches recognized the visual appeal and documentary importance of both portraits. It was not until 1979, when Metropolitan Museum researcher Dale Johnson recognized connections between these and a few similar portraits, that the name Robert Peckham was proposed as the artist.

Anne Elizabeth (born 1832) and Joseph Estabrook Raymond (born 1834) were raised in the town of Royalston, not far from Peckham's home in Westminster, Massachusetts. Their father was active in business and local politics. As in several other Peckham portraits, the children are shown rather tightly enclosed in a corner of the interior. They appear to come from a family of means, as they are fashionably dressed and surrounded by some of the



accoutrements of a comfortable life: a floridly patterned ingrain or Brussels carpet, an 1820s [Pembroke table](#), a bisque china doll, a pull-toy dog, and books indicating a conscientious religious education: a Bible and Isaac Watts' poetic paraphrases of the Psalms (first published in England in 1719 and in Boston in 1739). The straight-sided Staffordshire mug seen behind them, which bears the inscription "A PR[E]SENT FOR JOSE[PH]," is a type that was imported from England in substantial numbers and given to children as a reward for good behavior. A mug of exactly this design is included in Peckham's 1822 portrait of his nephew John Adams (private collection; reproduced in Peter Tillou, *Where Liberty Dwells: 19th-Century Art by the American People*, 1976, no. 28).





5

Robert Peckham (1785–1877)

Rosa Heywood, c. 1840

oil on canvas

112.4 × 74.3 cm (44 1/4 × 29 1/4 in.)

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

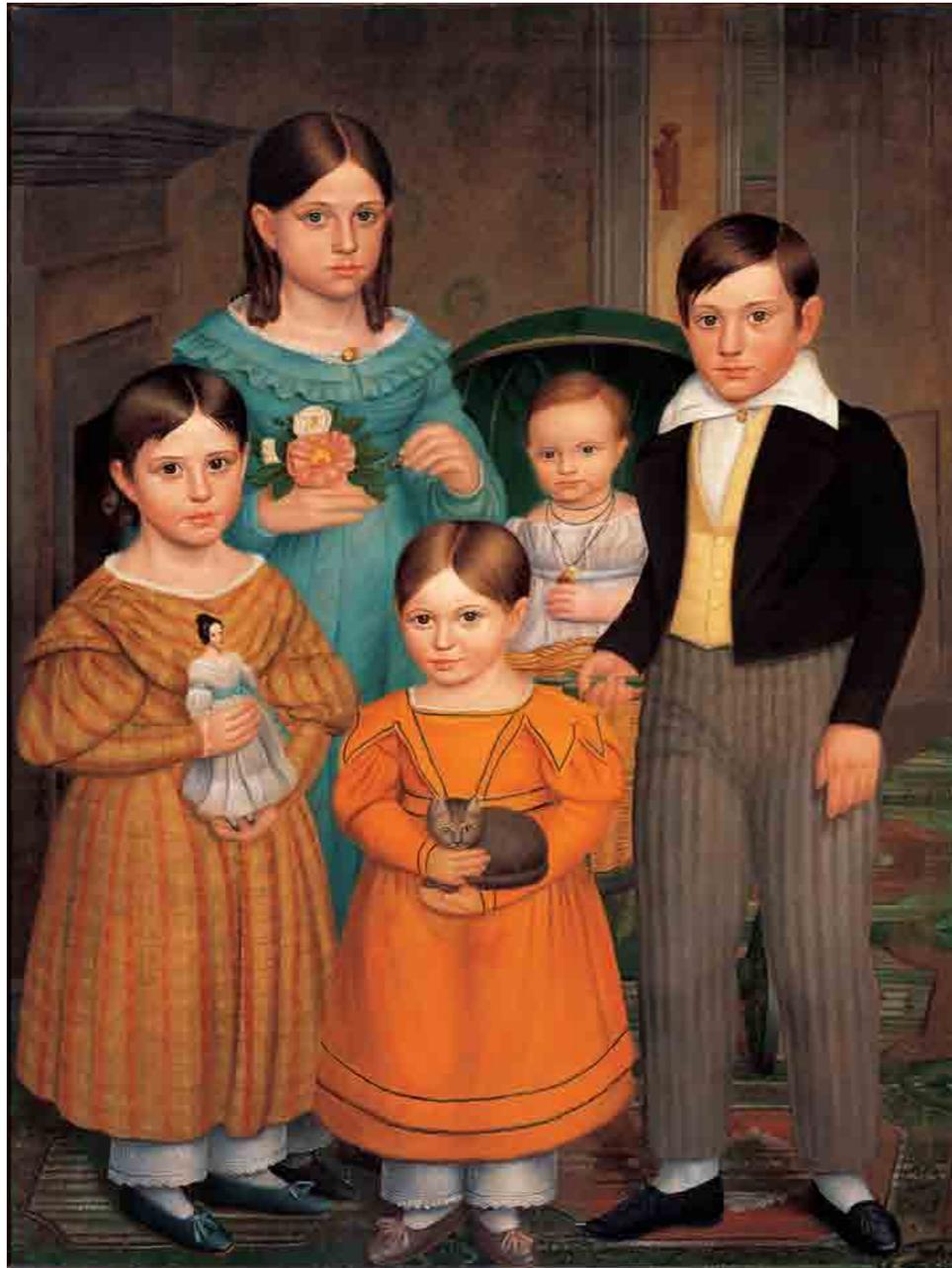
This appealing portrait, a favorite of visitors to Colonial Williamsburg's Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, depicts the daughter of the founder of the Walter Heywood Chair Manufacturing Company in Fitchburg, Massachusetts. Rosa (whose name was also recorded as Rosette) was born in the adjacent town of Gardner in 1834. She married the company's treasurer, William Otis Brown, in 1870.

Rosa is shown, strongly illuminated, in the corner of a room. Behind her a decorative planter contains a rosebush, presumably brought inside for this occasion, from which she has plucked a blossom that refers to her name. Her impressive dress, with its shirring and piping, and gold necklace bespeak a family of some means, as does the brightly patterned carpet and wallpaper (barely distinguishable in the shadows).

Though the painting is not signed or inscribed, it shares several characteristics with portraits attributed to Peckham,

including the prominent indentations of the skull at the child's temples, a stiff, frontal pose, strict attention to details of costume and furnishings, and a floor with an exaggerated upward tilt. Most arresting is Rosa herself, whose forthright gaze engages us intently and directly—one of the most distinctive aspects of Peckham's portraits.





6

Attributed to Robert Peckham (1785–1877)

The Farwell Children, c. 1841

oil on canvas

133.35 × 100.33 cm (52 ½ × 39 ½ in.)

Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York,

Gift of Ralph Esmerian, 2005.8.11

This brilliantly colored and perhaps most ambitious of all Peckham's portraits of children depicts the sons and daughters of John Thurston and Mersylvia Farwell of Fitchburg, Massachusetts. According to family accounts, it was painted the year Mary Jane (shown in her wicker carriage) died. John Farwell, owner of a flourishing scythe shop, was, like Peckham, a deacon in his local Congregational church, and the two men may have known each other in that capacity. Descendants did not record Peckham's name, knowing "of the painter only that he was an itinerant artist, by trade a 'wagon painter,' and that he lived in the family for several months while the portrait was in process." (Correspondence on file at the American Folk Art Museum, New York, and kindly provided by Stacey Hollander, senior curator.)

In this complex composition, each of the children is portrayed holding a different object: Elizabeth Mersylvia (1831–?),



flowers; Sarah Charlotte Tucker (1835–?), a doll; Maria Thurston (1838–?), a kitten; John Albro (1833–?), the handle of the baby’s carriage; and Mary Jane, a gold locket. The artist captured a wide variety of colors and textures, as well as the serious countenances of his subjects. Despite occasional awkward passages, such as the crudely depicted hands, the overall effect was no doubt grand enough to have satisfied the children’s parents. Only the figure of the baby seems to be unresolved, a common difficulty for Peckham, who faithfully recorded the subjects before him, but could not imaginatively summon up the features of the deceased. According to a Farwell descendant, Mary Jane’s gown was placed in the carriage while the painting was in progress to help the artist envision his composition.



7

Robert Peckham (1785–1877)

Webster Tucker, c. 1844

oil on canvas

116.8 × 83.8 cm (46 × 33 in.)

Jennifer and Tom Eddy

Captured as he is about to leave for school, young Webster (1834–1872) pauses at the door, cap in hand. With his slightly unruly hair and perhaps a faint smile, he stands in the corner before what appears to be a fireplace mantel, and upon a colorful yet fairly common [Venetian carpet](#). While probably true to life, the size and shape of the boy's head may reflect the nineteenth-century interest in phrenology, a pseudoscientific belief that the shape of the skull could indicate intelligence and character. Here, Webster's broad forehead sculpted in light may have been intended to suggest the boy's astute and moral nature.

The family for whom the portrait was commissioned was one of the earliest to settle in Winchendon, Massachusetts. An 1849 history of the town notes that Seth Tucker, from whom Webster was descended, was one of the original four settlers of Winchendon village. By 1848 there were “within the limits of the village, 640 inhabitants, 92 dwelling houses, three meeting houses,



1 Academy, 1 school house, 1 large hotel, 9 stores, 1 woolen factory, 1 iron foundry, 1 machine shop, 1 grist mill, 2 saw mills, 1 large bobbin factory, 1 tannery, 1 tub manufactory, 1 pail manufactory, 2 livery stables,... 4 blacksmiths shops, and various other shops for manufacturing and mechanical purposes, occupied by carpenters, coopers, wheelwrights, turners, shoemakers, harness-makers, tailors, and other mechanics..." (Ezra Hyde, *History of the Town of Winchendon from the Grant of the Township by the Legislature of Massachusetts in 1735 to the Present Time*, Worcester, 1849). In this thriving economy, an artist with Peckham's talents would have readily found a place.



8

Attributed to Robert Peckham (1785–1877)

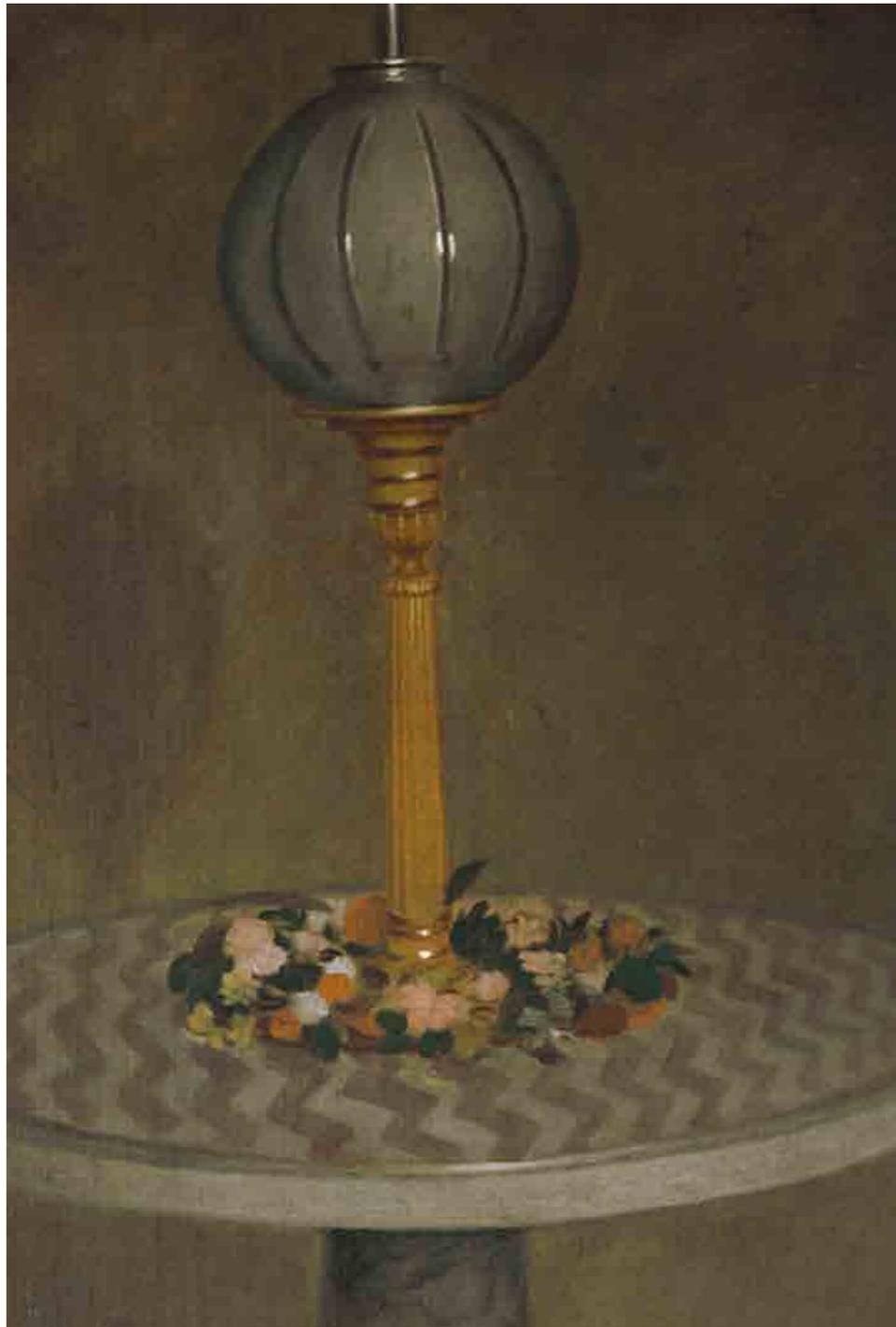
Charles L. Eaton and His Sister, c. 1844

oil on canvas

135.9 × 104.1 cm (53½ × 41 in.)

Fruitlands Museum, Harvard, Massachusetts

Is this a painting by Robert Peckham? Certainly, it shares the compressed corner space that is seen in many of his portraits of children. It has, as well, the Peckham elements of strong, single-direction light, attention to the details of furnishings, and an upward-tilted floor that exposes more of the carpet's lively pattern than would be seen in realistic perspective. Charles and Emily stand stiffly and solemnly, engaging us with their direct gazes, another characteristic of Peckham's painting. Yet the work appears to differ in subtle ways. This artist's palette is more subdued and the paint appears to have been applied more thinly than in the other works. However, the number of similarities with works attributed to Peckham suggests that this painting is connected to the artist. The unusual way in which the ground (layer beneath the surface paint) is brushed diagonally from lower left to upper right is also seen in *The Raymond Children* (no. 4) and *The Hobby Horse* (no. 9).



The portrait is believed to depict a brother and sister from Malden, Massachusetts: Charles Lynde Eaton, born March 1841, and Emily Lynde Eaton, born April 1838. Given that Charles is shown not yet wearing trousers (attire that boys assumed around age five), the portrait probably dates from around 1844 or 1845. The pair of [Argand lamps](#) on the mantel and the [astral lamp](#) on the marble-grained table suggest a well-appointed home. Nearly all of Peckham's sitters were from Worcester County, but these children lived just north of Boston, in Middlesex County. If they were, indeed, painted by Peckham, his range of activity may be wider than we thought.



9

Robert Peckham (1785–1877)

The Hobby Horse, c. 1840

oil on canvas

103.5 x 101.6 cm (40 ¾ x 40 in.)

National Gallery of Art, Washington,

Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch

This portrait of an unidentified brother and sister was titled, upon its acquisition by Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, for its most prominent feature. The toy is perhaps more properly called a rocking horse (the term *hobby horse* often refers to the simpler stick with horsehead), but the painting has retained the descriptive title. The Boston dealer from whom the Garbisches purchased the work recorded that it was found in an antique shop in Billerica, Massachusetts, but no clues as to artist or subject were attached. The typeface of the newspaper behind the horse's head may point to the *Daily Evening Transcript* (later the *Boston Evening Transcript*). The style of the children's clothing suggests a date of about 1840. While the boy's eyes look sideways, the girl's gaze connects her strongly to the viewer. We are invited into this tidy domestic space by the open door behind her that hints at a substantial home. The artist particularizes the setting by carefully

delineating each element: the colorful [ingrain carpet](#), the [rainbow wallpaper](#), the state-of-the-art [sinumbra lamp](#) on the table covered with an embroidered cloth. This intense attention to furnishings is characteristic of Peckham's portraits of children in interiors.





10

Ferdinand Herman (1807–1875)

Rocking Horse, c. 1857

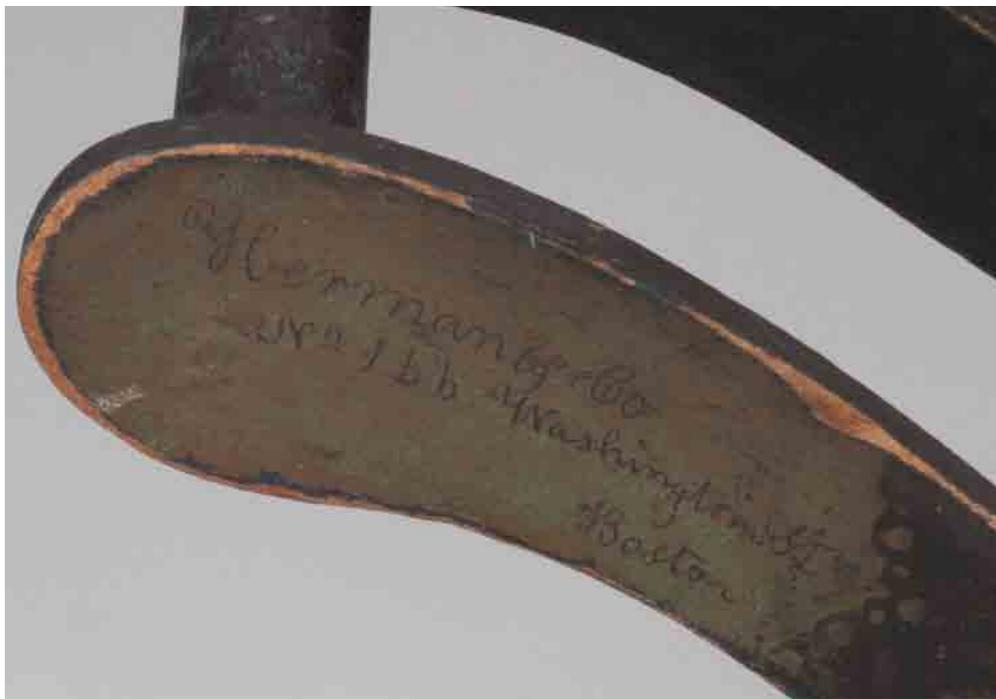
91.4 cm (36 in.) tall, 154.3 cm (60 ¾ in.) long

Courtesy of Historic New England,

Bequest of Frances S. Marrett, 1959.999

This impressive rocking horse was well loved and well worn by successive generations of the Marrett family of Standish, Maine. Handcarved and adorned with a horsehair mane and tail and glass eyes, it is covered with animal hide (probably calfskin), now mostly rubbed smooth, but the stitching of which can be seen on the inside of the horse's legs.

Several sellers of toys and woodenware advertised rocking horses in the late 1850s, and a number of companies, including Massachusetts toy makers Morton E. Converse in Winchendon and Whitney-Reed in Leominster, produced rocking horses in the later decades of the nineteenth century. The Marrett House example, however, comes from the earlier, prefactory tradition of the individual craftsman or small workshop. Inscribed on one of its rockers with “Herman & Co / No 166 Washington Street. / Boston,” the horse appears to be the product of Ferdinand Herman, listed in the Boston directories at that address in 1857–1860.



Detail showing Ferdinand Herman's signature



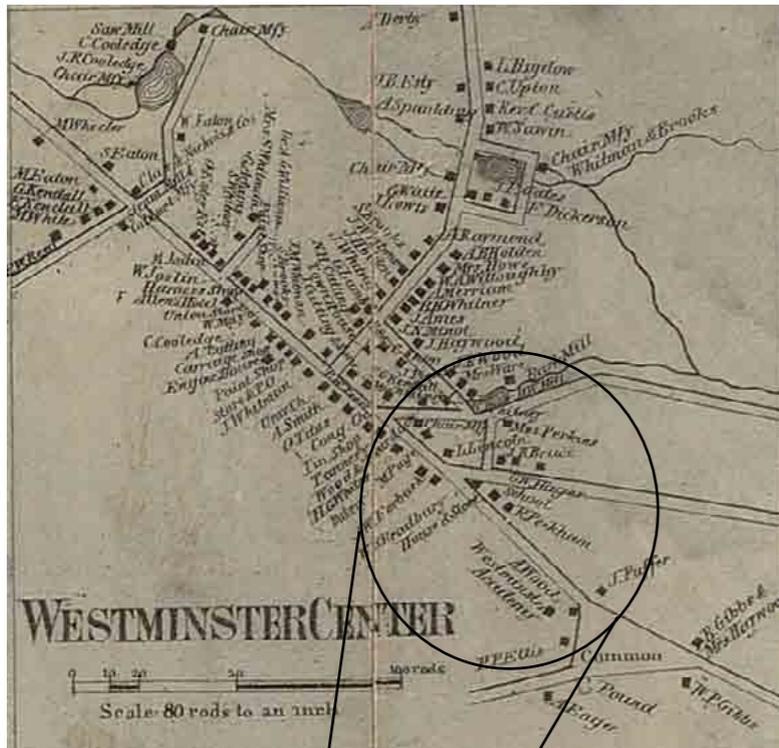
A few years earlier (*Annals of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Association*, 1853), Herman was listed as a “Fancy-Basketmaker,” and in the 1861 Boston Directory his company offered “Baskets and toys.”

The Marrett horse shares the same arch of the neck and elegant bow of the rockers that grace the *Hobby Horse* example. Both toys are also decorated with stenciling, one on the sides of the rockers, the other on the platform. The only odd note in the Marrett example is the addition of an elaborate red saddle identified in an inscription on the rocker as “New Mexican Saddle to Support the Back.” It has been suggested that the rocking horse depicted by Peckham was created by a craftsman of English or German origin, working in this country, a supposition that may also be true of the artisan who created the Marrett horse.

Chronology

	PECKHAM'S LIFE	LIST OF ATTRIBUTED WORKS
1785	September 10, born Petersham, Massachusetts.	
1809	January to April, studies with Ethan Allen Greenwood in Westminster.	<i>James Humphreys, Jr.</i> (Collection of Peter Tillou in 1976, signed "R. Peckham")
1813	February 7, marries Ruth Sawyer of Bolton.	
1813 – 1816	Lives in Northampton.	
1814	March 16, "Respectfully informs his friends and the public, that he has taken the shop in South Street...where he intends to carry on, — PORTRAIT — SIGN — ORNAMENTAL, AND HOUSE PAINTING-GILDING-VARNISHING, &c in all its variety." (<i>Hampshire Gazette</i>)	

1815	May 17, with brother Samuel H. Peckham advertises "House, Sign and Overmantel Painting. ALSO Gilding, Glazing and Varnishing." (<i>Hampshire Gazette</i>)	
1816	March 13, posts notice that their business is closing. May 15, reports "Dissolution of Copartnership," which occurred on April 17. (<i>Hampshire Gazette</i>)	
1816 – 1819	Lives in Bolton.	
c. 1817		<i>The Peckham-Sawyer Family</i> (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, trace of signature at lower right, "P" recognizable)
1819		<i>Betsy Baker Thurston Davis of Northboro, Massachusetts</i> (oil on panel, known to be Peckham through payment record, sold at Doyle, New York, on November 20, 2008)
1820	Moves to Westminster. Purchases lot next to school, built at 12 Academy Street.	



Henry Francis Walling, *Map of Worcester County, Massachusetts, Based on the Trigonometrical Survey of the State*, detail, 1857, Courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library

1822

John Adams (private collection, Minnesota)

Oliver Ellis Adams (sold at Sotheby's, New York, October 26, 1985, lot no. 2)

1823

Oliver Adams (the Adams children were Peckham's nephews)

c. 1825

Jonas Miller (Forbush Memorial Library)

Betsy Wood Miller (Forbush Memorial Library)

1827

May 9, advertises that his Westminister business could provide “house, sign, chaise, chair & ornamental painting, gilding &c,” painted floor cloths, fancy chairs, and portraits painted at patrons’ “residences in different towns, or at the shop of the subscribers.” (*Massachusetts Spy*, Worcester)

1828

Appointed deacon of First Congregational Church, Westminister

1829

July 15, sells his decorative painting business in Westminister. (*Massachusetts Spy*, advertisement repeated July 22 and 29)

1830

Mary Edgell (formerly Whitney Museum, sold Sotheby's, New York, July 16, 1999, lot no. 265)

1831

Westminster Village (Forbush Memorial Library, unsigned but inscribed on reverse "Painted by Deacon Robert Peckham, Westminster")

The Children of Oliver Adams (Charles N. Grichar)

c. 1832

George Peckham (artist's son; Margaret F. and William A. Wheeler III, inscribed "GR. Peckham" on collar)

Ruth Peckham (artist's daughter; Margaret F. and William A. Wheeler III)

Horace Lyman, John S. and Sarah Peckham (also known as *The Children of Reverend Samuel H. Peckham*, Eugene Peckham, Binghamton, New York)

Reverend Samuel Howland Peckham and Sarah Clark Peckham (Eugene Peckham, Binghamton, New York)

1833

Hutchins Hapgood and Elizabeth Hapgood (listed in Inventory of American Portraits; Mrs. Norman Hapgood, Petersham, Massachusetts)

John Greenleaf Whittier (on loan to National Portrait Gallery from Whittier Homestead, Haverhill, Massachusetts; documented in Whittier correspondence)

1834

March 19 and 26, advertises in the *Massachusetts Spy* his portrait business in Westminster “at his room over Messrs. Davis and Washburn’s office.”

March 24, visits Christopher Columbus Baldwin of the American Antiquarian Society, who records in his journal that Peckham is “not distinguished in his profession, tho he succeeds tolerably well in obtaining likenesses and has always gained his living by his art... His price is ten Dollars and his business is almost wholly in the country.”

George Wood (Forbush Memorial Library)

c. 1834

Timothy Doty, His Wife Susan Cowee Doty and Son Pearson (Forbush Memorial Library)

c. 1835

Sally Gates Brackett (Forbush Memorial Library)

Reverend William Chamberlain Jackson and Mrs. Jackson (both private collection, California)

Baby in Salmon Gown and Sister in Blue (private collection, Maine)

Abigail Derby and Almond Derby (both private collection, Maine)

Portrait of a Young Boy with a Toy Cat (at Sotheby's, New York, November 30, 1981, lot no. 1)

Portrait of a Young Girl in a Pink Dress (at Christie's, New York, January 15 and 19, 1999, lot no. 957)

c. 1836

Mrs. William Cowee with Music and William Cowee with Flute (both New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown)



Attributed to Robert Peckham, *Professor Edward Hitchcock Returning from a Journey*, c. 1838, oil on canvas mounted on board, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts, Gift of Lucy and Caroline Hitchcock

1838

October 30, Amherst professor Edward Hitchcock writes, "Paid Dea[con] Robert Peckham (voucher enclosed) for 24 Paintings of Geol. Specimens 18.00 For Board of himself & house 12 days...7.00" (Hitchcock papers in A & SC, Box 11, folder 13). Citation courtesy of Randall Griffey, curator, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College.

c. 1838

The Raymond Children (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Professor Edward Hitchcock Returning from a Journey (attributed to Peckham, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College)

c. 1840

The Hobby Horse
(National Gallery of Art)

Rosa Heywood (Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia)

Lucy Brown (Forbush Memorial Library or Westminster Historical Society)

Charles Norton (at Kaminski Auctions, October 2, 2011, lot. no. 5130)



Robert Peckham, *Nancy Spaulding Coolidge*, c. 1840–1850, oil on canvas, Forbush Memorial Library, Westminister, Massachusetts

c. 1840

A Pair of Portraits of a Lady and a Gentleman (Christie's, New York, January 20, 2006, lot. no. 316)

probably *Samuel Henry Peckham* (artist's son; private collection, Maine)

c. 1840 – 1850

oil sketches *The Woes of Liquor (Intemperance)* and *The Happy Abstemious Family (Temperance)* (signed, Worcester Historical Museum)

Nancy Spaulding Coolidge and *Charles Coolidge* (Forbush Memorial Library)

c. 1841

The Farwell Children (American Folk Art Museum, New York)

Oliver Prescott, *Daniel Prescott*, and *Elizabeth Prescott* (Jaffrey, New Hampshire, Public Library); reproduced in Luckey (see Bibliography), plates IV, V, and VI, inscribed "Robert Peckham pinxit."

c. 1842 – 1850

Mrs. Joslin and *Milton Joslin* (Forbush Memorial Library)

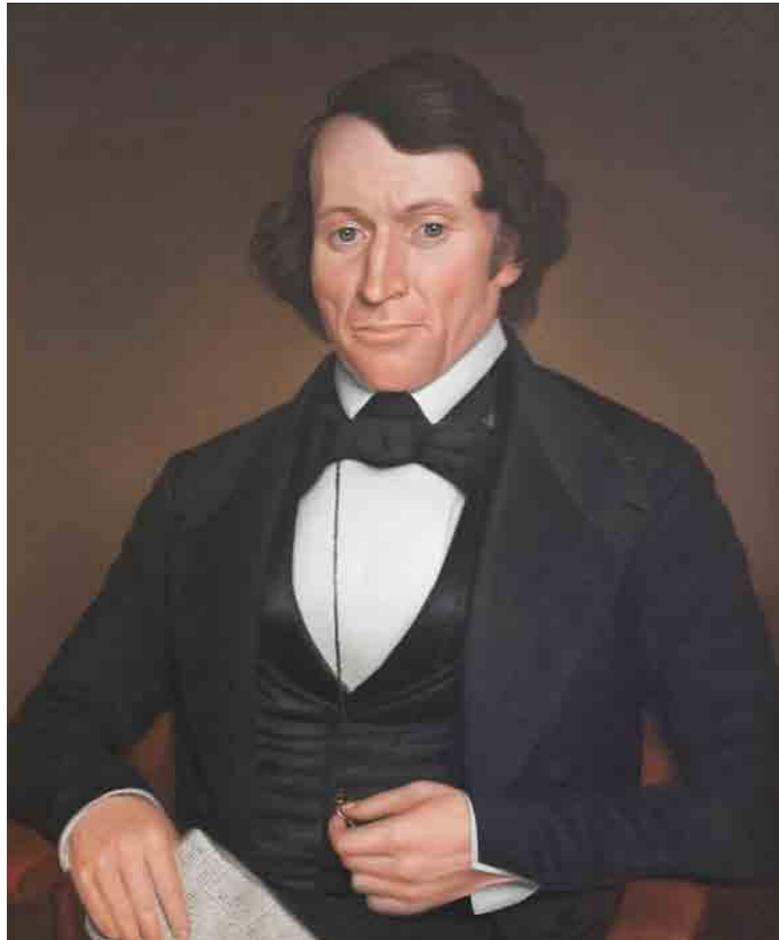
1842

February 7, wife Ruth dies.

Resigns deaconship.

PECKHAM'S LIFE

LIST OF ATTRIBUTED WORKS



Robert Peckham, *Charles Coolidge*, c. 1840–1850, oil on canvas, Forbush Memorial Library, Westminster, Massachusetts

c. 1842

Sarah Puffer Hubbard (Old Sturbridge Village)

Newton Simeon Hubbard (Old Sturbridge Village, inscribed “Peckham” on reverse)

1843

April 1, marries Mahalath Griggs.

c. 1843

Clinton Hager (Fruitlands Museum)

c. 1844

Webster Tucker (Jennifer and Tom Eddy)

Charles L. Eaton and His Sister (attributed to Peckham, Fruitlands Museum)

1848–1852

Listed in Worcester directories as a portrait painter.

1849

Listed in *The New-England Mercantile Union Business Directory* with 87 Summer Street (Worcester) address.

c. 1849

Frances Gage Cousens and *Humphrey Cousens* (both private collection, Maine)

-
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1850 | Excommunicated from the
Congregational church in Westminster. |
|-------------|--|
-
- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 1852 – 1862 | Possibly works in and travels between
Worcester and Westminster, a distance
of about twenty miles. He is listed
as “R. Peckham, Portrait Painter” in
the Westminster directory of H. F.
Walling’s 1857 <i>Map of Worcester County,
Based on the Trigonometrical Survey of
the State</i> . |
|--------------------|--|
-
- | | |
|-------------|------------------------|
| 1863 | Living in Westminster. |
|-------------|------------------------|
-
- | | |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| 1877 | Dies June 29, Westminster. |
|-------------|----------------------------|

Glossary

Argand lamp

An oil lamp patented by Swiss inventor Ami Argand in the 1780s. A tubular wick that draws air inside a glass chimney increases the amount of light provided by this oil lamp to six to ten times that of a candle. The term is also used by collectors to refer to a type of lamp operating on the Argand principle, and which feeds oil from a central fount to a burner mounted on an arm.

Astral lamp

An Argand-principle lamp designed with a flattened, circular reservoir (usually for whale oil) that minimizes the shadow the lamp casts on the table.

Bow horse

A rocking horse with rockers in the shape of bows used in archery.

Carding machine

Carding, or brushing wool to clean and align the fibers before it can be spun into yarn, was originally done with combs by hand. By the late eighteenth century, however, inventors had created water-powered mechanisms that accomplished this step with increased speed and efficiency.

Ingrain carpet

A flat-woven carpet made of ingrain wool (yarn dyed before being spun or woven) and having a reversed-color design on either side. It was the principal type of carpet woven in America throughout the nineteenth century.

Pembroke table

A small, four-legged table with drop leaves and often one or more drawers. The origin of the name (perhaps from Pembroke, Wales) is unconfirmed, but the form seems to have gained popularity in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Rainbow wallpaper

Based on a printing technique developed by an Alsatian company around 1820, wallpapers with blended color effects were called *irise* in Europe and “rainbow papers” in America. The alternating bands of dark and light of the same color, overprinted with an additional design, displayed color-shading effects similar to those seen in the carpets of the same era.

Sinumbra lamp

A modified astral (one having a ring-shaped reservoir) that is often tall in form to maximize its lighting effects. It was popular in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Venetian carpet

A simple type of flat-woven floor covering, home- or professionally made, generally in yard-wide strips, and limited to striped or checked designs. The term “Venetian” carpet is of uncertain origin, but does not appear to have any connection to the city of Venice.

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Cover: no. 9, *The Hobby Horse*, detail
page 2: no. 9, *The Hobby Horse*, detail
page 3: no. 5, *Rosa Heywood*, detail

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