

Historical Information of the Margaret F. Richardson Portrait of Mary Baker Eddy



The portrait of Mary Baker Eddy by Margaret F. Richardson shown above is one of two painted by Richardson in 1922 for the Christian Science Board of Directors to fulfill a 1918 commission. The portrait was based on a H. G. Smith photograph taken in April 1886.

In the spring of 1922, the Directors took possession of the painting and placed it in storage. The portrait was found in 1935 and placed in the Church Administration building's reception room. In 1936 it was placed over the mantel in the reception room of Chestnut Hill Benevolent Association, and has since been removed and placed in storage until a new location can be decided.

In 1981, the portrait was given to the Trustees of Chestnut Hill Benevolent Association.

THE MARY BAKER EDDY LIBRARY

FOR THE BETTERMENT OF HUMANITY

MARY BAKER EDDY – PORTRAITS BY MARGARET F. RICHARDSON

This portrait of Mary Baker Eddy, by the distinguished Boston portrait painter Margaret F. Richardson, is one of a number of portraits she painted of the founder of Christian Science. Richardson used photographs to create her works; she never met Mrs. Eddy, and Mrs. Eddy never posed for her.

It was in 1916 that Richardson was first commissioned by the Trustees under the Will of Mary Baker Eddy to paint a portrait. The completed picture, a full length portrait of Mrs. Eddy in her later years, initially hung in the Directors' Board Room (then in the Extension of The Mother Church). The painting proved so popular that it was thought wise to display it in a more public location; in 1922, it was brought to the newly opened Christian Science Benevolent Association, where it hung until 1934, when it returned to Boston, to the Board Room in the Church Administration building (107 Falmouth Street). A preliminary sketch of this portrait and the final work are in the collections of The Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity.

Perhaps because the first portrait had proved so satisfactory, the Christian Science Board of Directors commissioned Richardson to paint another portrait of Mrs. Eddy in 1918. This portrait, apparently based on both early and later photographs of her, did not prove successful, and Richardson destroyed the canvas in late 1921.

Wanting to fill the commission, Richardson soon began to paint two new portraits of Mrs. Eddy. By the spring of 1922, the Directors took possession of the paintings, and placed them in storage, though they were not entirely finished. These two portraits were found in the spring of 1935, and it was decided that one, a large canvas of Mrs. Eddy speaking from the balcony at Pleasant View, would hang at the Benevolent Association, replacing the 1917 portrait. The other, smaller portrait was placed in the Administration building's reception room. However, there was some dissatisfaction with the balcony portrait, and the smaller portrait replaced it in 1936. This is the painting that hangs at the Benevolent Association today.

Richardson's last commission came in 1934, when the new Christian Science Publishing Society building was completed. The Board of Directors asked her to paint a likeness of Mrs. Eddy for the Board of Trustees of the Publishing Society. This portrait was completed in 1935.

Margaret Richardson was not acquainted with Christian Science when she was first asked to paint a portrait of Mrs. Eddy. While she was painting this portrait, she felt she needed to know more about her subject, and so began reading biographies of Mrs. Eddy, as well as *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* and other writings. As a result, she became a student of Christian Science, and always felt that the first commission to paint Mrs. Eddy's portrait was a transforming experience for her.