



## 5: Milton W. Hopkins *Pierrepont Edward Lacey and His Dog, Gun* (1835–36)

Jacquelyn Oak

Folk artist and social activist Milton W. Hopkins worked in the Rochester area painting portraits in a plain, linear style from 1824 until about 1836. The portrait of Pierrepont Edward Lacey is one of his most successful and has become an American folk art icon. Owned by the family for over 140 years, the portrait was given to the Memorial Art Gallery by collateral descendents of the sitter in 1978.

Born in 1832 in Chili, New York, Pierrepont Edward Lacey was the son of Allen T. and Ann Gennett Pixley Lacey. The family moved to nearby Scottsville, south of Rochester, in 1835 and it was there that Hopkins painted this portrait and those of Pierrepont's mother and younger sister, Eliza. Allen T. Lacey, a prosperous farmer and businessman, was active in the anti-Masonic movement and Whig politics, as was Hopkins, and it is likely that they became acquainted through these associations.<sup>1</sup>

After the death of Ann Gennett, Allen Lacey remarried and, in 1847, the family moved west to Marshall, Michigan. There they joined other members of the Lacey family who had established farms in the Calhoun County area. Pierrepont apparently finished school in Marshall and, like his father and cousins, engaged in farming. In 1858, he married Agnes Antoinette McClure and the couple had one son, Henry Alden, in 1860. Pierrepont died in 1888 and is buried with his wife in the Austin cemetery, northwest of Marshall.<sup>2</sup>

The portrait of Pierrepont, nearly full-size, is one of the most ambitious and engaging likenesses taken by Hopkins. Solid and sturdy, the young boy, dressed in his best suit and red shoes and bolstered by his huge mastiff dog, looks out candidly at the viewer. The portrait exhibits characteristics typical of Hopkins's style: the facial features include a slightly oversized "C" shaped inner ear, salmon-colored lips, broad arching of the eyebrows, indented temples, soft modeling of the eye socket, highlights in the pupil and inner corner of the eye, and shading on the side of the nose. Like many other folk painters, Hopkins paid particular attention to costume details: Pierrepont wears a "tunic suit," complete with a round, ruffled collar and military-style gold buttons—a type of outfit very common for young boys in the 1830s. His dog "Gun," probably a restless subject, was depicted in realistic detail with brown and white markings typical of the breed. Unlike other animals included in folk paintings that may have been products of the artist's imagination or based on popular illustrations, "Gun" was a real pet. According to a family history, the Laceys raised mastiffs when they lived in Scottsville.

(Facing page)  
Milton W. Hopkins,  
1789–1844  
*Pierrepont Edward Lacey  
and His Dog, Gun*, 1835–36  
Oil on canvas, 42 x 30 1/8 in.  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert H.  
Dunn in memory of Ruth  
Hanford Munn and James  
Buell Munn, 78.189



Milton W. Hopkins,  
1789–1844  
*Portrait of Ann Gennett Pixley  
Lacey (1809–1841)*, 1835–36  
Oil on canvas, 30 x 25 in.  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert H.  
Dunn in memory of Ruth  
Hanford Munn and James Buell  
Munn, 78.187

Milton W. Hopkins,  
1789–1844  
*Eliza Pixley Lacey* (1834–1839),  
1835–1836  
Oil on canvas, 30 x 25 in.  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert H.  
Dunn in memory of Ruth  
Hanford Munn and James Buell  
Munn, 78.188

area and three were done by Hopkins after he moved to Ohio. All of the sitters were children whose parents were connected to Hopkins through their activities in reform movements or politics.

For many years, the Lacey portraits were attributed to Hopkins's student, Noah North (1809–1880), a native of Genesee County, New York. In the 1980s, the discovery of a portrait nearly identical to those by North, but signed and dated "M. W. Hopkins 1833" prompted a reevaluation of the entire body of work.<sup>3</sup>

In 1823, Hopkins moved with his family from Jefferson County, New York, to Albion, then the westernmost terminus of the Erie Canal, twenty-five miles west of Rochester. During his thirteen-year stay in Albion, Hopkins pursued a variety of occupations: his advertisements indicate that he was a portrait artist and teacher, chairmaker, gilder, "house, sign and fancy" painter, and canal boat captain. The social activism that characterized his later years in Ohio began in western New York. In 1826, Hopkins renounced his own Masonic affiliation and became a spokesman for the anti-Masonic movement that originated in nearby Batavia in Genesee County. By 1830, he was a leading spokesman for the Orleans County Temperance Society, traveling and speaking widely throughout the Rochester area. It is likely that his increasing involvement in the abolition movement prompted him to leave western New York and settle in Ohio about 1837. Until his death in 1844, Hopkins was an important supporter of the underground railroad in Cincinnati and Columbus and it appears that his portrait commissions from this time supported his participation in abolitionist activities.<sup>4</sup> Like most of Hopkins's sitters, the Lacey were active participants in a flourishing, rural society that was a focal point for many reform movements of the nineteenth century. Many such members of the middle class became supporters of temperance, anti-Masonry, and abolitionism. Through his highly visible participation in all of these movements, Hopkins established a clientele who subsidized his artistic endeavors and shared his progressive outlook.



A museum and fine arts consultant, Jacquelyn Oak has been a researcher for the Shelburne Museum in Vermont and registrar of the National Heritage Museum in Lexington, Massachusetts.