

John Tenney: The Journey of a 19th Century Portrait

A portrait of John Tenney (1801-1888) who was a resident of Hanover, NH recently made its way back to Hanover after a long absence.

The homecoming process was initiated by employees of the Nifty Thrifty Thrift Store in Fishkill, NY. They discovered a prominently written statement on the back of the canvas "John Tenney Born 1801- Painted at the house of R. A. Tenney Norwich, VT."

Tina from the thrift store contacted Judy Brown of the Norwich Historical Society and sent her a color copy of the front and back of the portrait. The painting itself, offered free, was to be sent later from Fishkill to Hanover.

Judy Brown and her assistant Nancy Osgood did some research and found that John Tenney had been a lifelong resident of Hanover, NH and had four children, all sons, one of whom was a painter. Because John Tenney had a life long residency in Hanover NH Cyndy Bittinger of the [Hanover Historical Society](#) was contacted and the color copy and accompanying information sent to her.

Several months elapsed before the actual painting made its way to Hanover. During this time, we at the Hanover Historical Society did further investigation into John Tenney. We found that he was a farmer who had also been Justice of the Peace for twenty years. He had also been a select board member.

We also investigated the history of his son who was said to be a painter. We

discovered that the son, Ulysses Dow Tenney (1842-1908) had been a very well known portrait painter with a lifetime output of around one thousand portraits, including notables such as president Franklin Pierce.

We were intrigued by the possibility that the painter Ulysses could have painted his father's portrait. We consulted Michael Hartman of the Hood Museum in Hanover. He was familiar with the paintings of Ulysses Tenney and thought, based on the style of the painting, that Ulysses was the likely author of the painting.

The suspicions about the son's authorship were confirmed when after several months, Hanover Historical Society received the actual painting. Careful inspection revealed the signature at the bottom of the painting. "Ulysses Dow Tenney." Cyndy Bittinger also discovered the date of the painting. 1886.

Having once received the painting, we looked for a place where it might be put on public display. Our hopes were answered when Etna Library agreed to take and display the John Tenney portrait.

On Dec. 11, 2023, a [celebratory meeting and portrait unveiling](#) took place at the Etna Library. Alan Callaway of the Hanover Historical Society gave an account of the portrait's journey from thrift store back to its rightful home in the Hanover community. We feel very satisfied that this finely painted portrait, painted by his son and returned to its proper home after a long absence, is on display.

