

Aaron Houghton Corwine

AARON HOUGHTON CORWINE

(1802-1830)

In a letter addressed to the Cincinnati Art Museum, August 7, 1913, Mr. J. Henry Lea of South Freeport, Maine, offered to lend a collection of Corwine paintings and souvenirs, which had been the property of his father, Mr. Henry Lea of Alton. First on the list was this picture, which Mr. Lea describes as a self-portrait, life sized, of Corwine in the fur collared cloak, presented to him when he went to England, by the father of the writer. He added that it was painted in London in 1829 and showed a background of woods. It was sold to Judge Richard Mortimer Corwine of Washington, D. C., and later presented to the Maysville Public Library by his widow, on her removal to England.

The subject was born in Mason County, Kentucky, the youngest son of Amos and Sarah Houghton Corwine, early settlers on Jersey Ridge from Hunterdon County, New Jersey. Two of their sons, Joab and Richard, were publishers, but Aaron was encouraged in his interest in art by being given lessons from a visiting painter named Turner, and, on the latter's advice, permitted to go to Cincinnati for study at a very tender age. Through the kindness of Dr. Daniel Drake, also a native of Mason County, he and his friends sent Corwine to study with Sully at fourteen. Two years later the artist began repaying these friends who had financed his lessons and in addition, started saving toward a trip to Italy. His untimely death ended a promising career. In 1826 Drake and Mansfield had boasted that he "had but a single rival in the Western country." His local obituary said, "As an artist, few of his age excelled him and had life been spared, he would doubtless, in a few years, have ranked with the most accomplished Painters of the age."