

WAX PORTRAITS AND SILHOUETTES

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Wax Portraits and Silhouettes by Ethel Stanwood Bolton

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ETHEL STANWOOD BOLTON

**WAX PORTRAITS
AND SILHOUETTES**

WAX PORTRAITS
and SILHOUETTES

By ETHEL STANWOOD BOLTON

With an Introduction by
CHARLES HENRY HART, Esq.



Second Edition

BOSTON
THE MASSACHUSETTS SOCIETY OF THE
COLONIAL DAMES OF AMERICA

1915

INTRODUCTION

THIS little brochure on *Wax Portraits and Silhouettes*, which I have had the privilege of reading in proof, merits the reception and approbation that should be accorded to every serious work in a new field of investigation. It is true that Mrs. Bolton had very fallow ground to plow in, but then it is not every one who recognizes the richness of the soil and knows how deep to furrow to get the best results out of the untouched field. This applies especially to the first part on Wax Portraits, for, while Silhouettes have been written upon more or less, Wax Portraits, as far as I know, have received but scant attention abroad and none at all here. This treatise, therefore, is a most valuable contribution to the artistic life in this country, presenting in a thorough manner for preservation the history of the work of the wax modellers in the United States; and as our pioneer in making wax portraits was a colonial woman, Patience Lovell Wright, it is most appropriate that the pioneer history of these little gems should come from the Colonial Dames of America.

CHARLES HENRY HART.

PHILADELPHIA, May, 1914.

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PREFACE

THE following pages are the outcome of a talk given before the Massachusetts Society of the Colonial Dames, at the rooms of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. The latter Society exhibited, under the direction of Dwight M. Prouty, Esq., a most interesting collection of wax portraits, silhouettes, and miniatures during the winter months of 1913-14, and that exhibition made possible this sketch. My thanks are especially due to Mrs. Barrett Wendell, who encouraged my present undertaking; to Mr. Charles Henry Hart of Philadelphia, who has given me many facts, and called my attention to such scattered literature as has been written upon both subjects; to Mrs. William H. Whitridge and Mrs. Francis T. Redwood of Baltimore, and to others mentioned in the notes. Especially I would offer my grateful acknowledgments to those who have been so kind as to allow me to copy their treasures for the illustrations.

E. S. B.

POUND HILL PLACE
Shirley, Mass.

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WAX PORTRAITS



THE art of modelling in wax is so old that it has come down to us from a past that is beyond history. The ease with which wax can be worked has insured its use throughout the ages, and its charm is ever the same to all generations. In the dim times of the past the Egyptian often modelled a deity in wax to accompany him on the journey after death, and to comfort his soul. So, too, the Greek made wax gods for his religious rites and wax dolls for his children's play. Later the Romans made wax masks of their ancestors—*imagines*—to be carried in the funeral procession. Only the nobles had the *jus imaginum*, or right to carry these wax impressions. The connection of the idea of the wax figure and religious rite persisted long after Roman time, for in the middle ages many wax figures were used as votive offerings in the churches. The old Roman idea in its entirety

continued through the time of Elizabeth, so that it was no uncommon thing for a wax image of the dead to be borne among the mourners. The wax form of Queen Elizabeth herself, which was carried, dressed in state robes, in her funeral train, is still preserved in Westminster Abbey. When at last the Renaissance blossomed over Italy, modelling in wax was one of the arts which bloomed also, for the great sculptors used that medium for many of their masterpieces.

Modelling in wax has always been done for one of two reasons, either as a means to an end or as an end in itself. During the Renaissance, doubtless, wax was used for both reasons, but more often as a means to an end. The bronze medallions of Pisano owe their delicacy to the fact that they were first modelled in wax. In addition to the work done by the medallists, cameo cutters, and modellers of coins, even sculptors themselves used wax first, as a means of developing an idea. Wax is most subtly and exquisitely responsive, for every minutest touch can be recorded upon it,