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# The Painters of Henry Clay as "The Sage of Ashland"

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## Library Notes

### The Painters of Henry Clay as "The Sage of Ashland"

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*Clifford Amyx*

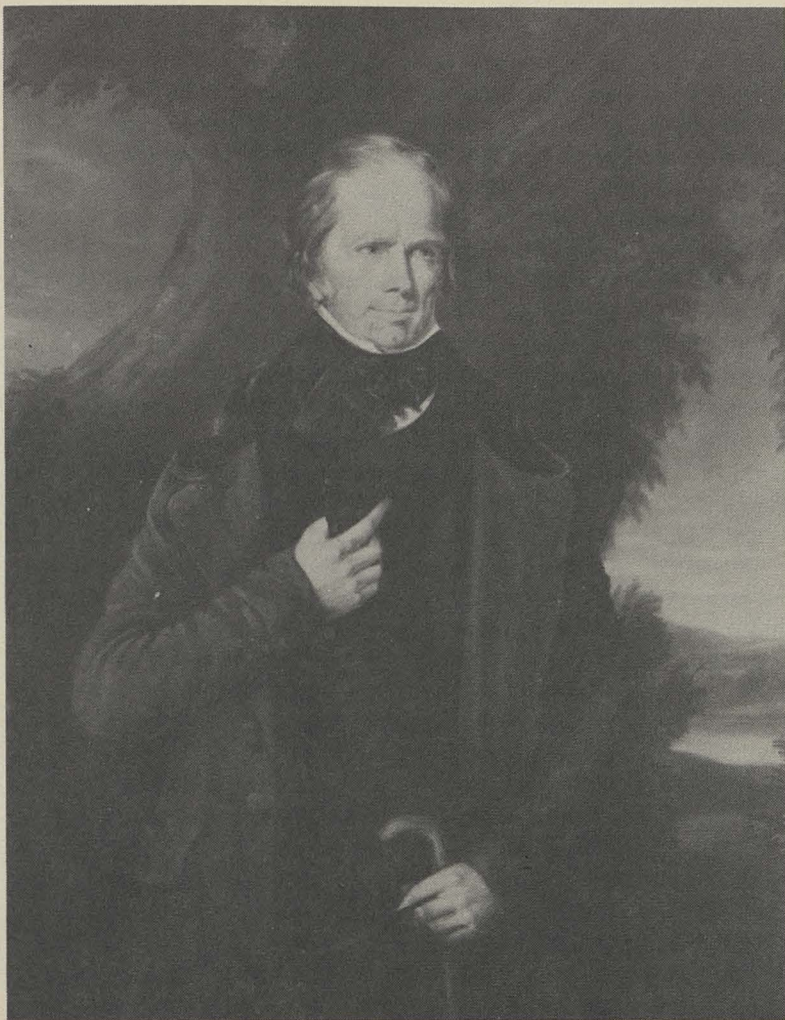
Of the portraits of Henry Clay, who may have been the most depicted man of the first half of the nineteenth century, there is a special group of three in collections at the University of Kentucky. These show Clay as a landed proprietor, walking on his estate, "Ashland." One is an original painting, cabinet size, by the lithographer and painter Alfred Hoffy; another is a replica of Theodore Sidney Moise's portrait of Clay now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and the final one is an engraving after a painting by John Wood Dodge. These three appear to be the only paintings which represent Clay in a full length portrait on his estate. All the paintings show Clay in his "walking" habit, with top hat, walking stick, and dressed rather formally in long coat, and waistcoat. All the paintings show an ash tree. In two of the paintings there are additional details—cattle, a plowman, or some suggestion of an agrarian setting; and these two paintings were surely intended to be engraved or lithographed in connection with the presidential campaign of 1844.

Clay had failed to win the nomination of the Whigs in 1840, and he was to suffer the brief tenure of William Henry Harrison, and the longer tenure of "His Accidency," John Tyler. This had been the "Log Cabin" campaign, with hard cider by the barrel at party meetings, and under the slogan "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too." But this was no image for Clay in the coming campaign of 1844, and another was preferred, with Clay as the "Sage of Ashland." The three paintings variously represented at the University of Kentucky are attempts to supply that image.

Of these three paintings showing Clay at "Ashland" the most substantial one, and the largest in size, is the one by Theodore Sidney Moise. It appears in Lexington in a copy made at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1937, and this is now at the Margaret I. King Library. The original painting is signed "Moise/Jan/1843," but this signature was misread at some time as "Morse" and the painting mistaken for one by Samuel F. B. Morse. It is often forgotten that Morse was a major painter before he became interested in the technique of the daguerreotype, which he learned from Daguerre in Paris, and in the telegraph, which he invented, and for which he is best known today. When Charles Henry Hart, the first writer to be interested in the portraits of Henry Clay, came across the "Morse" painting in 1897 he accepted the misreading of the signature, and though Hart knew that Morse had given up painting by 1839 he believed that "Morse no longer considered himself a professional painter."<sup>1</sup>

The portrait by Moise (Fig. 1) shows Clay three-quarter length, standing in front of a very large tree, presumably an ash tree, with a tall hat, a walking stick, a long coat, and a waistcoat. To Clay's left is a body of water which appears to be a lake, perhaps corresponding to the lake which became the present Lexington Reservoir No. 1, at the east of Clay's estate. The features of Clay are competently painted, somewhat softer and more bland than the related bust portrait of Clay by Moise,<sup>2</sup> which may have been a preliminary study. The body, however, is not so deftly painted, and Clay's right arm is lifted awkwardly to touch the top of his waistcoat lightly. This may indicate that Clay never posed for a full-length study, though Clay was in New Orleans at the time and possibly would have had time for such a pose.

The replica of Moise's portrait which now hangs in the King Library was carried out with the permission of the Metropolitan by Mayo Curtis Hendricks in 1937.<sup>3</sup> It was made to be placed in the resort hotel at White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, and from there it came to the university as a gift from the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. Hendricks's painting varies only slightly from the original, extending the bottom portion to show more of Clay's hat. The portrait at the university still bears a plate with the attribution to Morse, even though the late Professor Rannells of the Art Department at the university pointed out that the painting had no such competency and manner as that of Morse. Moreover, the signature was read correctly at the Metropolitan by Harry B.



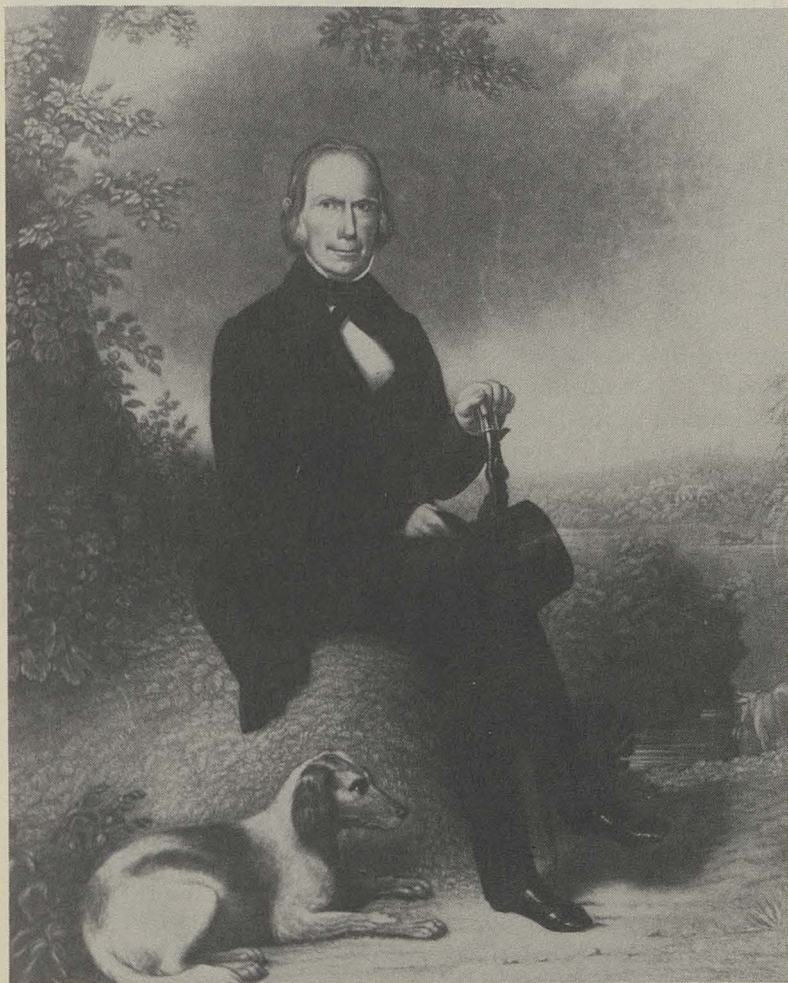
*Theodore Sidney Moise, Henry Clay, 1843 (All rights reserved. The Metropolitan Museum of Art). A 1937 replica of this portrait, by Mayo Curtis Hendricks, is in the Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky.*

Wehle, curator of American Art, as early as 1925.<sup>4</sup> The original painting was commissioned by Col. John Freeland at New Orleans, and went to Lexington, Virginia and then to the Havemeyer collector at New York, thence to the Metropolitan. It is not known when the signature was misread and the attribution to Morse was made. In any case, such an attribution—with Morse's name—enhanced the history and value of the painting, so that any museum would have been glad to own it.

There is no indication that Moise's painting was intended to be more than a mark of personal or political admiration for Clay on the part of Col. Freeland.<sup>5</sup> Nor does it seem in any special way a prelude to the campaign of 1844, though it was surely clear that Clay would be in contention for the nomination. The smaller paintings of Clay by Dodge and Hoffy, cabinet size though full-length portraits, were surely intended to be relevant to the campaign, and to be engraved or lithographed for wider distribution.

The small painting by John Wood Dodge, the second work to be considered here, shows Henry Clay full-length and seated at the foot of a tree. It was surely a bid for attention to Clay as a candidate for the presidency in 1844. Dodge made at least two copies, and the "original" of the three is presumably the one now in the collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts at Philadelphia. From it an engraving was made by H. S. Sadd for still wider circulation and to generate further attention to Clay. Another replica of Dodge's painting by himself, which was formerly in the collection of the Louisville Free Public Library, disappeared in the great flood of 1937 and now must be presumed lost. Still another replica of the painting is in a private collection in the state of Florida.<sup>6</sup>

The engraving by Sadd, now in the university collections (Fig. 2), is in fact clearer and more decisive than Dodge's original painting.<sup>7</sup> Clay is shown seated at the foot of the tree, presumably an ash tree, with his top hat, his walking stick, and with his dog at his feet. In the middle distance is a cow moving toward a stream or a lake, and beyond is a plowman. In the background, too, is a residence which bears no obvious resemblance to the mansion at "Ashland." The likeness of Clay is adequate but not remarkable, which suggests it may not have been "from the life." Beyond this work, Dodge is also credited with miniatures of Clay and Lucretia Hart Clay which are at the Walters Gallery in



*H. S. Sadd's engraving of Joseph Wood Dodge's portrait of Henry Clay. (University of Kentucky Libraries)*

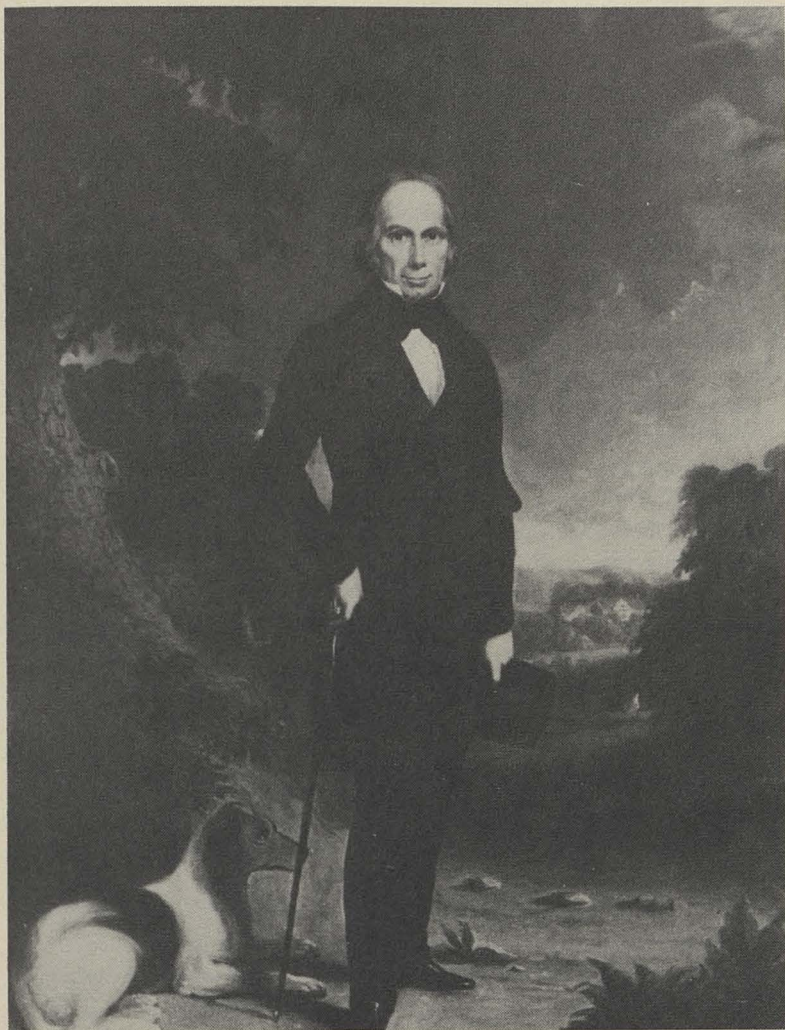
Baltimore; the likeness of Clay is so suspect that it adds nothing to the history of Clay.

Dodge was a painter who worked to occasion and in varied media. Not only did he prepare panoramas in the South, he also did portrait painting, as well as miniatures, as the opportunity presented itself. Whether the painting of Clay was intended originally to be engraved has not been determined. It was surely Sadd's engraving, however, that formed the substantial contribution to the campaign and that promoted the image of Clay as the "Sage of Ashland."

The final painting in this group of three works is a cabinet size painting by the Philadelphia painter and lithographer Alfred G. Hoffy. The original painting is now in the Special Collections Department at the University of Kentucky. Cabinet size paintings had long served Clay and other national figures as preparatory studies for engraving and, somewhat later, for lithography. Clay had paid Joseph Wood fifty dollars in 1825 for a small painting, which was engraved by A. L. Dick. (It may possibly have been used as late as the campaign of 1832 against Jackson.) Another cabinet size painting by Wood served the deaf mute lithographer Albert Newsam for his portraits of Clay in the early 1830s. Both paintings by Wood are now lost. William J. Hubard, the English painter and silhouettist, made a small painting of Clay in 1832, also intended to be useful in a campaign, but this painting was engraved afterward, and became one of the best known images of Clay. It appeared in Longacre and Herring's *National Portrait Gallery* in 1835.

Hoffy's small painting of Clay, practically unnoticed through the years (Fig. 3), was brought to the University Libraries some years ago by the Kentucky historian Thomas D. Clark. The painting had been seen in New York by Prof. Paul Anderson, Dean of the College of Engineering at the University. Hoffy is almost wholly unknown today as a painter, although he exhibited a varied (nearly unrelated) group of works at the Artist Fund Exhibitions in Philadelphia. He made a western trip prior to 1840, when he exhibited *A Prospective View of the City of Cairo Illinois*. He exhibited *Buffalo* (of unknown location) in 1847. It is not known whether he was ever in Lexington or, if so, whether he saw Clay at home.

Hoffy's work as a lithographer in Philadelphia is far better known. He had been trained in New York before he went to Phila-



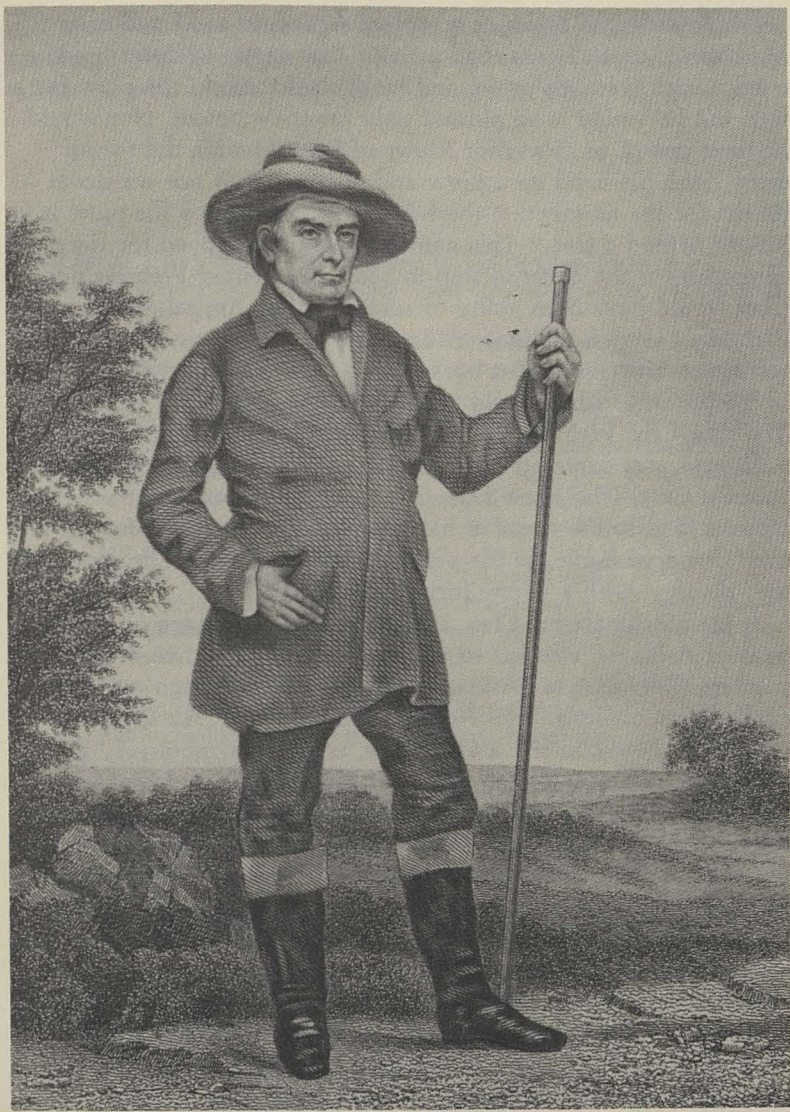
*Alfred G. Hoffy, Henry Clay. (University of Kentucky Libraries)*



delphia, then a center of the lithographic and engraving trades, seeking employment. He was soon at work and at one time was editor and principal artist of the *Orchardist's Companion*, where his color lithographs were to gain him the title "pomologist." He was known also as one of the principal lithographic artists for the publication of military costumes. He published independently such prints as *The Artillery Corps of the Philadelphia Greys*. He became known later as a painter of small works of excellent "finish," including work over daguerreotypes and photographic prints, praised as having "all the delicacy and finish of miniatures on ivory, with the advantages of being as perfect in likeness as photography can make."<sup>8</sup>

Hoffy's painting of Clay at "Ashland" had this special finish. It is even-tempered and methodical and also quite bright. Hoffy, more comfortable with a standing figure, painted Clay upright, with the familiar stick and hat. The dog is an almost exact replica of the dog in Dodge's painting, which Hoffy possibly knew from Sadd's engraving. Even the likeness of Clay is very close to that of Dodge, which in itself may have been derived from someone else. The portrait by Hoffy is that of an accomplished "borrower," and yet it has a certain charm and brightness, even a certain integrity which makes it a soundly crafted work. Hoffy was a lithographer, and there is every likelihood that the picture was intended to be lithographed, possibly in color, at which Hoffy was skilled, although no such lithograph is known in the ordinary sources.<sup>9</sup> That Hoffy very likely pieced out his image of Clay was an accepted practice among printmakers working to occasion, and Hoffy's painting has a special kind of naive charm.

Of these paintings which attempted an image he would surely have approved, Henry Clay at least from his correspondence apparently had no special knowledge. Clay's still patrician and slaveholding economy belongs to the South, of course, but the plowman in the distance is so far away that he may be either black or white. A comparison of these portraits of Clay with similar estate owners in the North is instructive. His great senatorial colleague and sometime ally, Daniel Webster, is shown by Joseph Ames's *Tramping Over Marshfield*.<sup>10</sup> Webster has a very long stick or staff, almost as tall as he, but knobbed at the top, which suggests more than a sapling or a mere convenience for the moment. He wears his usual broad-brimmed hat, worn at home especially, a casual cover coat long enough to reach the knees, and



*Proof of an engraving of Joseph Ames's painting of Daniel Webster, Tramping Through Marshfield. (The National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)*

nearly knee-length boots as a protection against mud and briars. Marshfield, near the sea, had a significant name. Webster bred oxen, which were his pride, and he hitched them to the plow for a test, but he would have plowed only for the moment. Nor would he have posed, as Governor Ritner of Pennsylvania did for an artist, with his hand on a plow and his coat—but not waistcoat—doffed for the moment. If there is a horse hitched to the plow it is hidden behind a tree.<sup>11</sup> This painting was lithographed for the campaign for the governorship in 1839, but neither Webster nor Clay would have been guilty of such a blatant appeal. When Webster is shown at home outdoors he is usually on the porch, or resting an arm over a slat-backed chair under a tree, with his oxen in the distance. Clay would never have permitted such informality. The rock-hard Webster, always admired by the painters for his solid presence, contrasts very greatly with the elusive, mobile, and colorful Clay, who knew how to temper his remarks to the moment and to the needs of his listener. Webster was informal and even casual at home, as the painters saw him, while Clay was ever the "dandy," with a strong formal presence.<sup>12</sup>

It is unfortunate for Clay, of course, that the image of "The Sage of Ashland" was left to minor painters.<sup>13</sup> The two major painters who came to "Ashland" close to the campaign came with explicit commissions. John Neagle came to paint Clay the statesman, heroic in size and posture, with the symbols of "The American System," for the Whigs of Philadelphia and for the campaign.<sup>14</sup> G.P.A. Healy, who arrived soon after the campaign, came on commission from Louis Philippe of France to paint bust portraits of noted Americans. He had just been to the Hermitage to paint Clay's old rival Andrew Jackson. Clay enjoyed Healy's gossip of the courts of Europe, but he would chide Healy that the painter showed no interest in his farm or livestock, of which he said that he was prouder than of his finest speeches.<sup>15</sup>

Neither Healy nor Neagle, painters of skill and reputation, showed Clay as the "Sage of Ashland," although their portraits are the best in the years close to the campaign of 1844. Neagle's painting was engraved by John Sartain, and both the painting and the engraving were well known by the time of the election. Healy's bust portrait, copied by himself and others (notably by a certain Major Clark who came to Lexington to do so), was well known, but only "retrospectively," and without direct relevance to Clay's later career as a statesman. Clay's special image as the landowner,

and a very different kind of Whig from that of the "Log Cabin" campaign, was ironically to be left to minor painters when the talents of great artists might have served him well.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Charles Henry Hart, "Life Portraits of Henry Clay," *McClure's Magazine* 9 (September 1897): 941-48. Hart comments on the portrait and reproduces it on page 942.

<sup>2</sup>The bust portrait by Moise is in the Tennessee State Museum, Nashville. There are no documents with the painting. It appears more hurried and uncertain than the features of Clay in the full-length painting.

<sup>3</sup>I am indebted to Burton Milward for information transcribed from the back of the copy by Hendricks. Nothing is recorded of Hendricks in the standard sources on American artists of the early twentieth century.

<sup>4</sup>*Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 20 (1925): 216.

<sup>5</sup>Clay's relation to Col. Freeland is not documented in the Papers of Henry Clay at the University of Kentucky. The portrait is early in the career of Moise at New Orleans, where he formed a partnership with T. T. Fowler. Both artists painted up-river and in Kentucky. Fowler may have painted a portrait of Clay in New York, but such a portrait has not been identified.

<sup>6</sup>A special search for the lost portrait from the Louisville Free Public Library located the presumed "original" in Philadelphia and the replica in Florida. Photographic copies of these paintings reveal they are slightly different from the lost painting.

<sup>7</sup>H. S. Sadd came from England to America, possibly at the urging of Samuel Osgood. He engraved Osgood's portrait of Clay, published by Ackerman in London in 1839. Sadd's habit of "improving" painters' works is evident in this bust portrait; he adds a grove of trees to the back and to the right of Clay.

<sup>8</sup>Hoffy is nearly unnoticed in standard histories of early American artists, although there is a brief notice in George C. Groce and David H. Wallace's *Dictionary of Artists in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957). The only source of substance on Hoffy's work is Nicholas B. Wainwright, *Philadelphia and the Romantic Age of Lithography* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Society, 1958), especially page 81.

<sup>9</sup>Early American lithographers are still without a standard reference, though Currier & Ives prints are now indexed in two very large volumes, *Currier & Ives: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1983).

<sup>10</sup>*Webster Tramping Over Marshfield*, by Joseph Ames, is reproduced in Sydney George Fisher, *The True Daniel Webster* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1911), 305. No location is given for the painting. Ames exhibited frequently at the Boston Athenaeum.

<sup>11</sup>The painting of Governor Ritner at the plow is in the Kirby Collection, Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania.

<sup>12</sup>Chester Harding, who had come to Kentucky as a young man and later painted the only authentic portrait of Daniel Boone, also painted Clay in 1821-22. But when he came to Washington in 1844 he much preferred to paint Webster, with whom he "messed." His portrait of Clay full-length is now in the National Portrait Gallery, Washington.

<sup>13</sup>A lithograph of Clay full-length by Francis D'Avignon is the frontispiece to Epes Sargent's *Life and Speeches of Henry Clay* (New York: Greely & McElrath, 1844). This small lithograph shows Clay in a flowing cape, with a top hat and walking stick, standing high on a very sketchy landscape. This is Clay as if dressed for an evening at the theater.

<sup>14</sup>Neagle's portrait was both useful and admired, engraved by John Sartain, and praised especially in the West. Neagle made a replica of the painting for the Capitol in Washington, and there were smaller copies by other artists. A large copy by Ambrose Andrews is at "Ashland," in Lexington.

<sup>15</sup>G. P. A. Healy, *Reminiscences of a Portrait Painter* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1894), 147-48.