



# THOMAS P. MOSES (1808-1881)

THOMAS PALMER MOSES WAS BORN near Sagamore Creek in Portsmouth and became the town's leading musician and poet during the 1830s and 1840s. A book of poems and essays was locally published in 1849 as was a colorful "autobiography" in 1850 that insulted all his "enemies." From the 1850s on he transformed himself into one of Portsmouth's most interesting Victorian painters and cultural entrepreneurs. Remembered at his death in 1881 as "full of poetry, music, painting – anything but money," the early 20th century saw his paintings first appreciated by modern artists for their striking primitive or folk art quality.

## COMING FROM THE NAVY YARD, PORTSMOUTH

Trapped inside the Confederacy during the Civil War while teaching in the South, Moses returned to Portsmouth in December 1866. He established a painting studio above the *Morning Chronicle* offices near Market Square, and began to record local maritime life.

This view of a race across the Piscataqua River from the Portsmouth Naval Ship Yard to Portsmouth shows dozens of punts, dories, and multi-oared whaleboats shooting out from the wharves after the last bell from the Head House. Each boat, representing the different trades or shops of those employed at the Yard, had its traditional rival and "warm language was the order of the day. It was no place for a sensitive soul." Along the shore, in waiting rowboats and from the steam ferry, observers cheer on the race.

T. P. Moses, *Coming from the Navy Yard, Portsmouth*, Aug. 1867, oil on canvas. Photo from *Maritime Portsmouth, The Sawtelle Collection*, Portsmouth Marine Society. Photo: Ralph Morang.



## THE SHIP CHARLES CARROLL

The ship *Charles Carroll* is shown "On the Piscataqua from the North End of Noble's Island." The painting, of the riverfront with St. John's Church rising above Bow Street warehouses and wharves, looks across the Piscataqua to Badger's Island and the Navy Yard beyond in Kittery.

The largest of all Moses' paintings, it was recognized then and now, as his finest work. Identified on the back as "Original. Thos. P. Moses. Portsmouth, N.H. The Fall of 1875" this was also his last before he left the city to teach music at an academy in Marietta, South Carolina.

Local patrons sponsored a testimonial, gave the impecunious artist a purse of cash, and raffled his last "Marine view of the Piscataqua River, Navy Yard, etc." Leaving in January 1876, the 68-year old Moses suddenly married (for the first time) in Boston a Portsmouth woman, Nettie Franklin. He died alone "a martyr to the graces three" in South Carolina in 1881.

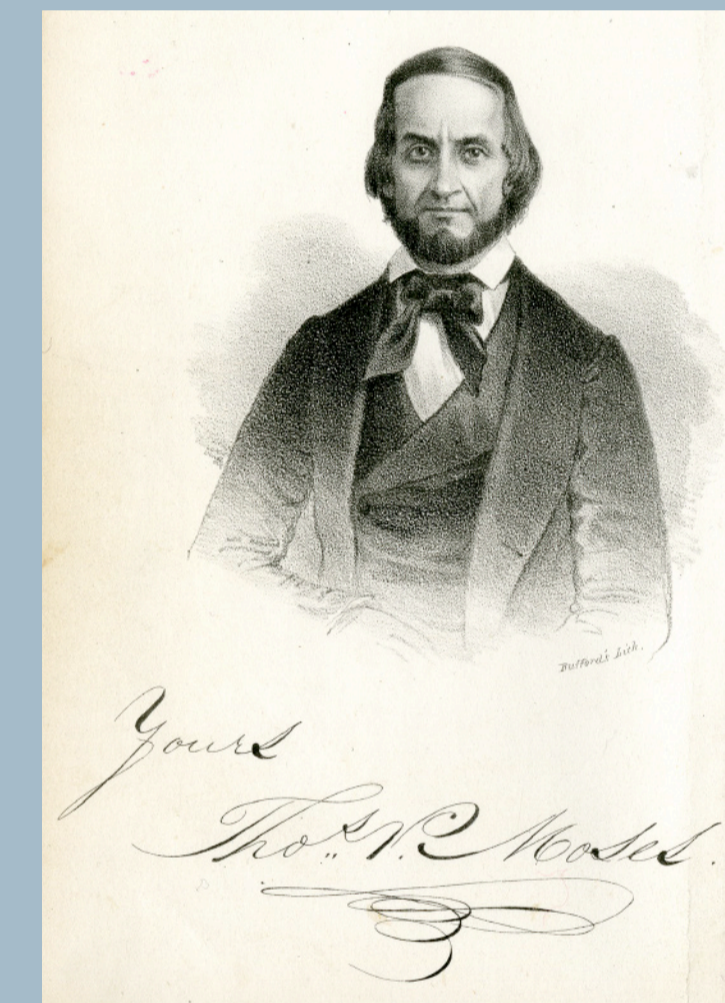
Thomas P. Moses, *Charles Carroll*, oil on canvas, 41½" x 54", showing the ship *Charles Carroll* out of Rockland, Maine, "On the Piscataqua from North end of Noble's Bridge. . . Portsmouth, N.H. The fall of 1875." Courtesy of Northeast Auctions, Portsmouth, N.H.



## ENTERING PORTSMOUTH HARBOR

Trained as a painter in Boston and New York City, Moses often painted the entrance to Portsmouth Harbor featuring Whaleback lighthouse, Fort Constitution in New Castle, and vessels of all shapes and sizes. This example shows the ship *Venice*, built locally by George Raynes in 1841, returning to port. It may have been painted about 1855 when she gained some notoriety for transporting an elephant to Philadelphia. The ship burned to the waterline in 1859 while carrying coal from Liverpool to New York.

T. P. Moses, *Entering Portsmouth Harbor*, ca. 1850s, oil on canvas. Courtesy Northeast Auctions, Portsmouth, N.H.



## T. P. MOSES PORTRAIT

This portrait shows Thomas P. Moses (1808-1881) when he was a leading musician, poet, and essayist in Portsmouth. His signature in his characteristically bold hand is often found the reverse of his paintings along with the title and often a date.

Frontispiece Portrait of TPM from *Leisure Thoughts in Prose and Verse* (1849) by Thomas P. Moses, steel engraving with signature. Courtesy of Portsmouth Public Library.

Funding for this historic marker was provided by the City of Portsmouth, 2017.

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