

Portland, Maine, Engravers of the 1820s

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PART II

PORTLAND was not long without an engraver, for in December, 1824, David G. Johnson arrived to carry on the trade. He took an office at 4 Market Square in Gilbert's Block, directly under Beethoven Hall and commenced engraving in all forms as well as copperplate printing.¹

Four examples of Johnson's work remain that were executed in or about 1825. The first is a light blue satin Lafayette ribbon which measures $9\frac{1}{4}$ inches by $1\frac{5}{8}$ inches. (Fig. 1.) It bears an engraving of the famous man in civilian clothing. Above his head are thirteen stars amid rays of sunlight and an eagle with a banner in its mouth which proclaims "WELCOME LAFAYETTE." The words "D.G. JOHNSON Sc." appear just below Lafayette in the lower right of the composition.

Like Orramel Throop's Lafayette novelty, David Johnson's is probably the product of a copperplate. However, Johnson's is a more refined piece of work than Throop's. The portrait is superior in accuracy, detail, modeling, and expression. The eagle motif above it is more decorative and spirited than the greeting enclosed by a line.

The Johnson ribbon probably dates from 1825 because it was worn by Stephen Longfellow during Lafayette's visit to Portland on June 25 of that year. Longfellow, father of the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, was then a Congressman, and he delivered a welcoming speech to the General at the outskirts of the town. The ribbon is now pre-

served in the Wadsworth-Longfellow House.

The second piece of David Johnson's



FIG. 1. LAFAYETTE RIBBON, ENGRAVED BY DAVID G. JOHNSON, CIRCA 1825, $9\frac{1}{4}$ INCHES BY $1\frac{5}{8}$ INCHES
Collection of the Wadsworth-Longfellow House, Portland.

work to be discussed was an ambitious undertaking, a 27 inches by 50 inches *Chart of Portland Harbour and Islands and Harbours Adjacent, Extending from the river Kennebec to Wood Island and Winter Harbour*. Johnson engraved it

from the original made by Lemuel Moody,² who drew the map from the 1776 Des Barres survey of the New England coast with his own additions and corrections.

The *Chart* was entered according to the act of Congress on July 13, 1825. Its large size required that it be engraved on three copperplates and printed in sections, the first measuring 27 inches by sixteen inches; the second, 27 inches by 16¼ inches; and the third, 27 inches by 16¾ inches. The pieces were then joined together. An advertisement in the *Eastern Argus* for September 16, 1825, stated that the *Chart* had been completed and would be published in the course of three or four weeks. However, the earliest indication of its being placed on sale comes from an *Eastern Argus* advertisement of January 3, 1826.

Like Abel Bowen's *A New and Correct PLAN of PORTLAND MAINE*, the chart engraved by David Johnson is an entirely practical piece of work, competently done and lacking ornamentation except for a few small ships. It was revised in 1828 with such additions as two lighthouses that had recently been built on Cape Elizabeth.³ No copy of this second printing has been located to date.

Early in the spring of 1825, the spire and tower of the First Parish Meeting House were torn down, and the eighty-five-year-old building was moved to make way for a new one, the present First Parish Church. Before this happened, Johnson must have made a drawing of the structure because the second part of William Willis's *The History of Portland*, published in 1833, has an engraving of it entitled *A SOUTH VIEW OF THE FIRST PARISH MEETING-HOUSE* and labeled "DRAWN AND ENGRAVED BY D.G. JOHN-

SON PORT." (Fig. 2.) Plate marks in the book measure 6½ inches by 5⅝ inches.

Perhaps Johnson made this copperplate at the time of the meetinghouse demolition and planned to sell impres-

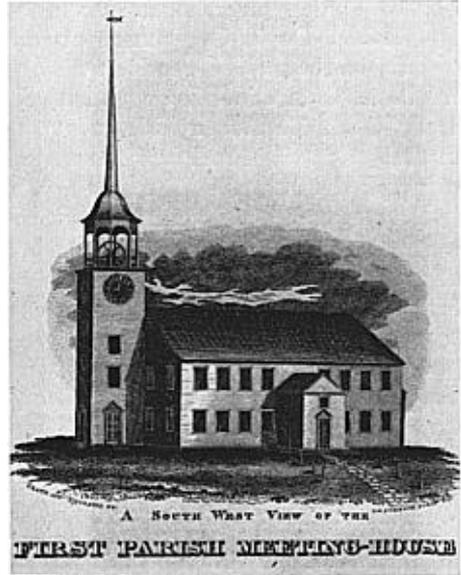


FIG. 2. A SOUTH VIEW OF THE FIRST PARISH MEETING-HOUSE, DRAWN AND ENGRAVED BY DAVID G. JOHNSON, CIRCA 1825, PLATE MARK 6½ INCHES BY 5⅝ INCHES

Illustration from *The History of Portland*, Part II, by William Willis, Portland, 1833.

sions from it as remembrances, for a certain amount of sentiment was attached to the old building. There is no record of this intention, but the plate must have been cut before Johnson left the town in 1827 because it bears the abbreviation "PORT." after his name. There is also no explanation of how the plate found its way into Willis's volume six years after its engraver's departure from Portland.

In any case, David Johnson's meeting-house engraving is a wonderful visual record of one of Portland's most important eighteenth-century buildings. It also reveals that Johnson drew as well as engraved. He demonstrates his knowledge of cast shadows by creating the effect of a direct light source which shines brightly on the surfaces that it hits and throws the others into shadow.

The fourth example of David Johnson's work to date from about 1825 is the membership certificate of the Portland Nautical Society. A blank copy of the certificate is owned by Mrs. Dean A. Fales, Jr., of Kennebunkport, Maine, and was illustrated in her *Winter, 1967, OLD-TIME NEW ENGLAND* article about Johnson. It measures 12¼ inches by 9¼ inches. Miraculously, the original copperplate survives in the collection of William B. Jordan, Jr., of Portland. It is 11½ inches by 8½ inches and one sixteenth of an inch thick.

The Portland Marine Society had been functioning since 1796, and thus, the reason for founding the Portland Nautical Society is uncertain. Its constitution and by-laws were published in 1825 and stated that it was instituted on November 2 of that year "To advance the Commercial Interests of the town of Portland, to promote the increase of Nautical Science, and the acquisition of Natural History, and to extend friendly aid to unfortunate Ship-Masters."⁴ Perhaps these goals were felt to be broader than those of the Portland Marine Society.

With the constitution and by-laws was a list of ninety-one members, each having to be a United States citizen and having had "to command a ship or other vessel"⁵ out of an American port on an extended voyage. Newspaper notices reveal that

the Society held meetings at least through February, 1827.⁶

Although the Portland Nautical Society's duration was brief, its certificate constitutes the most appealing example of Portland engraving that remains from the 1820s. The upper section probably depicts a scene off Portland Head Light. In the middle section, wording of the membership certificate is superimposed on a chart of Portland Harbor which is surmounted by a fish and flanked by a swag of kelp on the left and trophies of spears, trident, rope, and oars on the right. Below is one cluster of a fasces, globe, quadrant, and hourglass and another of an anchor, cannon, and balls.

Although Johnson engraved the certificate, the credit for its design goes to "A. Scot Del." Scot could have been the Scot, first name unknown, who is cited in Groce and Wallace's *Dictionary of Artists in America 1564-1860* as having painted a copy of the Massachusetts State House's portrait of the Reverend John Wheelwright in 1803.⁷ More likely, A. Scot was Andrew Scott of Portland, a merchant, a mariner, and an amateur artist.⁸ He drew a map for Willis's *The History of Portland*⁹ and probably did signed pen and ink sketches of three local scenes, *Monument on Cape Elizabeth 1817*, *Diamond Cove 1819*, and *Portland 1821*. These views are known through copies made in 1900 and now at the Maine Historical Society.

Further evidence of the diversity of David Johnson's work is found in his May 9, 1826, *Portland Advertiser* notice, which he headed with an eagle holding a banner in its mouth that reads, "ENGRAVING." Above the bird are thirteen stars, rays of sunlight, and the motto, "American Arts only want encouragement." The contents of the ad-

vertisement reveal a desire to practice many facets of the engraver's trade:

THE subscriber respectfully gives notice that he will attend to the different branches of his profession, (at his office, Court Street,) in a style which he trusts from the experience he has attained, will meet with general acceptance. HISTORICAL, PORTRAIT, MAP and CHART, in particular.

DIPLOMAS and CARDS, also, with appropriate designs, and ornaments. Some specimens of which may be referred to in his possession. Merchants and mechanics, wishing Copperplate CARDS, are requested to call, as it is presumed they can be accommodated to their wishes.

Drafts of machines taken, and blocks cut from the same. STAMPS cut for Manufacturers, Door and Trunk PLATES, KNOCKERS, &c. marked. Perforated PLATES, VISITING CARDS, SEALS, Wood and Metal CUTS, &c.

COPPERPLATE PRINTING executed in a proper manner, either with or without colours.

Orders from all parts of the State promptly attended to.

David Johnson stayed in Portland through part of 1827, engraving the map (Frontispiece) for *The Portland Directory and Register* published in March of that year.¹⁰ This plate was then updated for the directories of 1831 and 1834, both years in which Johnson's name appears on the map even though he was in New York. The plate was used without his name in five directories between 1846 and 1856, each time being brought up to date. Thus, eight states of *A PLAN OF PORTLAND* were produced over a twenty-nine-year period. As with Abel Bowen's 1823 map, Johnson's is strictly a tool with only a touch of fancy work in the legend. While Bowen suggested water with a few wavy lines and left large areas of white, Johnson filled in much of his water with wavy lines and the town's developed area with slanted ones.

The Portland Directory and Register for 1827 listed Johnson as an engraver over the Cumberland Bank on Exchange Street. On April 5 of that year, he published the following notice in the *Eastern Argus*:

WHEN the subscriber commenced business in this town, he was determined to make a permanent establishment in the line of his profession, provided the patronage he should receive would justify the same. But having made a fair trial, and receiving but slender encouragement, he takes the liberty to inform the Public, and those, especially, who wish to obtain any description of engraving, that he shall remain here but a short time longer. They therefore will do well to embrace the present opportunity. (as one favorable in point of price and style may not offer again for many years.)

He will receive a few more DOOR PLATES which will be sold at Boston prices. Names cut on KNOCKERS at short notice.

Daniel G. Johnson later became a portrait painter and engraver in New York City. His name is listed in directories there for 1831 through 1835, 1843, and 1845.¹¹

The last engraver to visit Portland in the 1820s was George Washington Appleton, who came from Boston when he was about twenty-four years old.¹² His advertisement in the March 27, 1829, issue of the *Eastern Argus* read:

GEORGE W. APPLETON has opened a room for COPPERPLATE ENGRAVING in all its various branches; at No. 5, Court street, Portland, where he will engrave on WOOD; sink Notary, Letter & other SEALS, and do every thing that may be in the line of Copperplate and Wood engraving.

Also, PORTRAIT PAINTING.

No engraving from Appleton's Portland period is known, but one portrait survives, the Maine Historical Society's painting of author John Neal in 1829. The Society also owns seven of George W. Appleton's pencil sketches of Port-

land and vicinity done that year. These include Richardson's Wharf (see cover of Winter, 1971, OLD-TIME NEW ENGLAND), a shipyard, a tollhouse, a cottage, a scene in Portland looking toward Cape Elizabeth, a public house on Bang's Island in Casco Bay, and a woman resident of the island shown with her spinning wheel. Accompanying the sketches is the following sheet of instructions to Appleton for engraving the head of the *Yankee Laborer's Journal*, a newspaper which is not known to have been published:

To the Engraver

On the foregoing page is a rough outline for the Head of a Newspaper about the size of the Portland *Daily Advertiser* (perhaps larger), to be engraved on *Wood & Stereotyped*.

The periphery of the figure as to *size* may vary from the present to 9 by 3 inch^s though the present size is much preferred, as well as *form*.

The *Nail*. Arms, above, may be a little more spread & larger as the Engravers taste may suggest. But in the State Arms below we protect against 2 things—1st. having the Pine thus [pen sketch of pine tree with boughs pointing downward] instead of so [pen sketch of pine tree with boughs pointing upward]—2d against having the Tree stuck into the couchant Deer's back! as is the case in most of the engravings.

The wreaths & fillets are left entirely to your own taste, but we wish the figure well filled with flowers &c.

As to the Letters of the word "Yankee" perhaps the "block" here given may be well; but if ornamented, they must be *distinct*.

The words "Laborer's Journal" must be very distinct however plain.

George Appleton returned to Boston by 1830.¹³ He exhibited at the Boston Athenæum Gallery that year¹⁴ and died in 1831.

The Portland engravers of the 1820s had much in common. They were young. Danforth Newcomb arrived in the town at the age of twenty-one; Abel Bowen,

at thirty-one; Sidney Bowen, at twenty-two; Orramel Throop, at twenty-five; and Daniel Throop and George Appleton at twenty-four. They were probably attracted to Portland because it was an active port as well as the capital of Maine. With little or no apparent competition, they hoped to capture both the local and statewide markets. However, engraving needs must have been limited, and a certain percentage of business probably continued to go to Boston. For example, while David Johnson was in Portland, painter Charles Codman was acting as the agent for an unidentified Boston engraver. Near the end of his advertisement in the *Eastern Argus* for July 19, 1825, Codman announced:

N.B. Mr. C. will receive orders for any branch of ENGRAVING, to be accomplished in Boston by one of its first artists.—ADDRESS & VISITING CARDS, DOOR PLATES, SEALS, STENCIL or NAME PLATES, furnished at the same prices as in the City.

Thus, the engravers did not make Portland their permanent place of business and residence. Research at the Cumberland County Registry of Deeds reveals that none of them owned property in the town. While Newcomb's stay was ended by death, Johnson's last notice makes it clear that he left because he was not doing well enough financially. Most likely this reason lies behind the departure of the others, too.

All of the engravers seem to have been able to work with copper, wood, and type metal and do copperplate printing. They offered a great variety of services in order to make a living. Most of these were of a strictly utilitarian nature. The few pieces of their Portland work that remain reflect this. Abel Bowen's map, Orramel Throop's business card and Lafayette engraving, and David John-

son's Lafayette ribbon, harbor chart, nautical society certificate, and map were created for practical purposes even though they may carry some embellishments. Johnson's meetinghouse view is the only engraving that appears to be free of a particular use, although it may have

been conceived as a commercial venture. The surviving work of Portland's engravers in the 1820s is respectably done and possesses the American qualities of clarity and factualism. It mirrors a society which still regarded engraving primarily as a trade instead of an art.

NOTES

¹ Advertisement in the *Eastern Argus* of December 20, 1824.

² Captain Lemuel Moody, 1767-1846, was a Portland mariner who designed the Portland Observatory of 1807 and was its keeper until his death. Three copies of his *Chart* are owned by the Maine Historical Society along with his portrait and some of his manuscript maps.

³ Advertisement in the *Eastern Argus* of September 30, 1828.

⁴ *Constitution and By-laws of the Portland Nautical Society*, Portland, 1825.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Eastern Argus*, November 18, 1825, January 31, 1826, May 2, 1826, August 22, 1826, February 13, 1827.

⁷ This idea was advanced by Mrs. Fales in her OLD-TIME NEW ENGLAND article.

⁸ Andrew Scott, 1798-1888, is listed in the 1823 Portland directories as a seller of English goods and in the 1827 directory as a merchant. On page 427 of William Goold's *Portland in the Past*, Portland, 1886, the historian refers to Scott as Captain Andrew Scott, "a ship-master, sailing from Portland." Goold then publishes a letter from Scott dated Flushing, New York, August 14, 1880, in which the old man reminisces about his early life in Portland. His statement that "The map of the town in Willis's History is my drawing." reflects an interest in drawing which could link him with the Portland Nautical Society certificate and the three signed and dated sketches of the Portland area to be mentioned shortly.

⁹ William Willis's *The History of Portland* was published in two parts, the first in 1831 and the second in 1833. Part one contains a map entitled *ANCIENT FALMOUTH*

FROM 1630 TO 1690 and part two has two maps, *Grants made by the Proprietors of FALMOUTH (on the Neck) now Portland: principally between 1720 & 1728 inclusive and FALMOUTH NECK. As it was when destroyed by MOWETT. Oct. 18, 1775.* The maps do not carry a delineator's credit line. They were lithographed by Pendleton in Boston. Of the three, the latter may have been the one that Scott drew, because it is of a pictorial nature with houses, buildings, and ships shown.

¹⁰ *The Portland Directory and Register* was first advertised in the *Eastern Argus* of March 13, 1827. The only known copy with a map is in the Rare Book Division of the Library of Congress. The map measures 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches by 12 inches.

¹¹ Stauffer, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 142.

¹² George W. Appleton was born in Boston in 1805 and died there in 1831. This information comes from a letter written by Georgiana Appleton, his daughter, to Hubbard Winslow Bryant, Secretary of the Maine Historical Society. In this communication of September 2, 1901, now in the Society's files, Miss Appleton expressed pleasure that the organization wanted the John Neal portrait by her father and offered his seven sketches as well as the sheet of engraving instructions.

¹³ Sinclair Hamilton, *Early American Book Illustrators and Wood Engravers 1670-1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), Volume II, Supplement, p. 41. Hamilton mentions several book illustrations which may be attributable to Appleton during his Boston period.

¹⁴ Mabel Munson Swan, *The Athenæum Gallery 1827-1873* (Boston: The Boston Athenæum, 1940), p. 197.