

MARITIME DISASTERS IN THE WINTER OF 1839 & 40, a lithograph by Benjamin Champney, 1840. (Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.)

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The Lithographs of Benjamin Champney

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Benjamin Champney (1817-1907) was a skillful and prolific landscape painter of the Hudson River School who devoted decades of untiring attention to the scenery of the White Mountains of New Hampshire. His present place in the history of American art rests less on his paintings, however, than on his unpretentious autobiography, *Sixty Years' Memories of Art and Artists*, written in the 1890s, published in 1900, and ever since a valuable source of information about several notable nineteenth century American artists.¹

Early in his memoirs, Champney relates how he came to be an artist. In 1836 he was taken on as an apprentice for three years in the shop of Thomas Moore, then the chief lithographic printer of Boston. In 1839, following the completion of his apprentice term, he free-lanced as a lithographic artist in Boston for Moore and his successor, B.W. Thayer & Co., and also for the shop of William Sharp and Francis Michelin. He was an able lithographer, but because he aspired to be a painter rather than a graphic artist, he saved what he could from his earnings and in mid-1841 sailed for Europe to

study in Paris.² His subsequent success as a painter has always overshadowed his early accomplishments as a printmaker.

In his brief account of his years as a lithographic artist in Boston Champney mentions some of his shop mates who went on to fame as artists, the most important of whom were Fitz Hugh Lane and William Rimmer. He comments on their work as lithographers while, in his usual self-effacing way, he makes no mention of his own achievements. Only because he sometimes signed his drawings on the stone has it been possible to identify the twenty-one prints recorded below. Although they must represent only a small part of his work between 1836 and 1841, they are sufficient to show that by 1840 he had become a very accomplished illustrator, though not one of marked individuality.

His success as a painter following his return from Europe in 1848 left him with no need to resume the flourishing career in popular illustration he had suspended in 1841, though his work was occasionally reproduced by other graphic artists. In 1847 his strongly drawn portrait of the actor William A. Barnes was copied onto

stone by Samuel Worcester Rowse.³ In the 1850s a number of his landscape drawings were lithographed by other artists and in the 1870s several of his oils were reproduced as chromolithographs by Louis Prang.⁴ These reproductions may have had Champney's approval, but none were by his hand. During the 1850s and 1860s a graphic artist with the same surname, W. L. Champney, was active as

a popular illustrator in Boston, though apparently not as a lithographic artist.⁵

Fourteen of the prints recorded below are title page illustrations for printed music. Three of them (check list items #10, #16, #20) are described as "surpassingly beautiful" in an unsigned puff about the Boston music publisher Henry Prentiss which appeared in 1841 in the *New-York Mirror*, a popular magazine, and

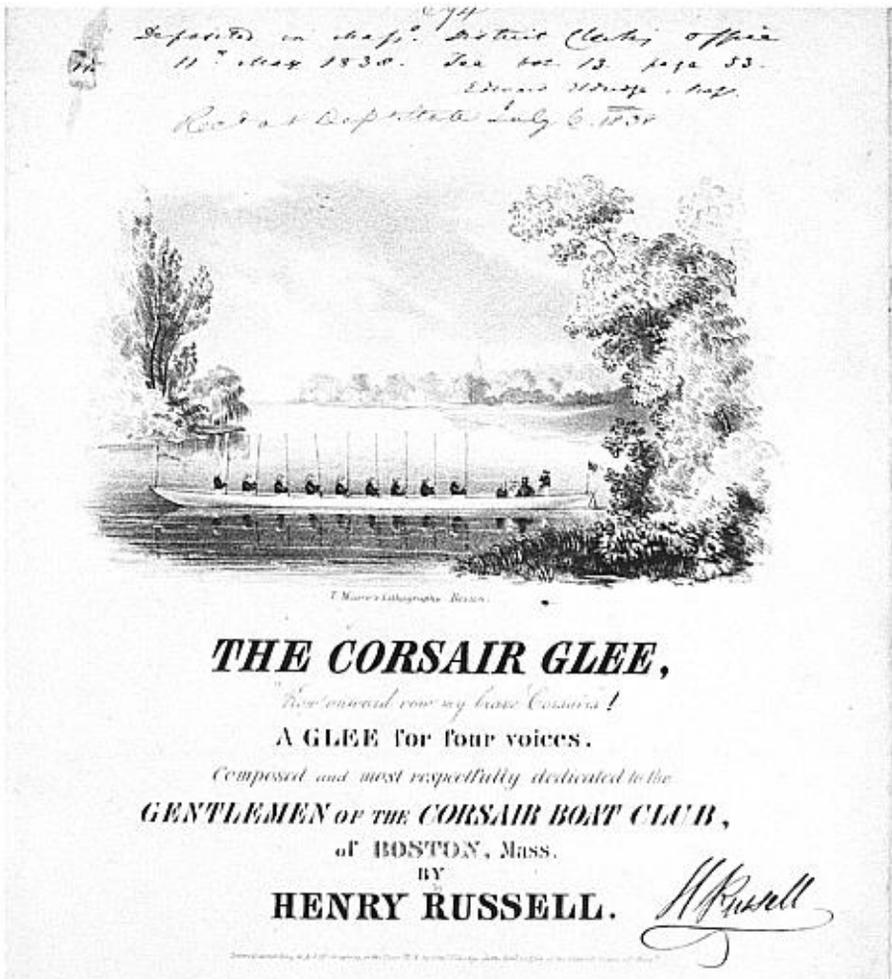


FIG. 1. THE CORSAIR GLEE, a lithograph by Benjamin Champney, 1838. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

although such overpraise is to be taken with a grain of salt, it is significant that of the eight titles singled out from the Prentiss catalogue as worthy of special comment, three are by Champney (who is not mentioned by name).⁶ With one exception (#19), all of the music illustrations listed below seem to be Champney's original designs. Three of them (#1-Figure 1, #17, #18) are important as pictorial documents of Boston life.

Of even greater documentary value is Champney's *First Church, Medford*, probably drawn in 1840, the largest of his lithographs and among the rarest (#5-see cover). Beyond its value as the best pictorial record of this late colonial meeting-house, a building which was taken down in 1839, *First Church, Medford* has merit as a finely produced lithograph, forthrightly simple in both concept and execution. The print perpetuates some of the laconic strength of eighteenth century practices of view making in Boston while it also shows the softer naturalism encouraged by the medium of lithography. *First Church* is a confident example of a vernacular approach to printmaking which had little to do with what Champney would learn about the fine art of painting in France.

CHECK LIST

The lithographs are listed by year, and alphabetically by title within each year. Dimensions of the pictorial image are given in centimeters, height before width. The use of a tint stone to provide a second printed color is noted following the name of the printer; the tint may not be found on all impressions. The form of Champney's signature on stone is given in quotation marks and its location in relation to the image is given by the following abbreviations: *l.l.* — lower left; *l.c.* — lower center; *l.r.* — lower right. The

locations of impressions in selected institutional collections are given by the following abbreviations: AAS — American Antiquarian Society; BA — Boston Athenaeum; BPL — Boston Public Library; LC — Library of Congress. The date of deposit of the copyright copy at LC, when known, is given in parentheses.

1. *The Corsair Glee*. 13 x 21. Moore. 1838. "B.C. del" *l.r.* LC (11 May 1838).

Title page vignette for "The Corsair Glee," a song by Henry Russell, dedicated by him to "the gentlemen of the Corsair Boat Club of Boston." A crew of nine, a coxswain, and three passengers are shown in an outsize shell. No publisher is given. Copyright is claimed by Edward Eldridge.

Russell was an English song writer and entertainer who often visited Boston where several of his songs were published, at least five of which were illustrated by Champney. (See also 9, 10, 14, 18.) Russell's autobiography *Cheer! Boys, Cheer!* (London: John Macqueen, 1895) recounts many anecdotes of his years in North America, but makes no mention of Champney.

2. *Residence of the Late Charles Barrett, Esq. N. Ipswich, N.H.* 16.2 x 19.9. Moore. 1839. "B. Champney del." *l.l.* AAS.

A view in Champney's home town. This print was later freely adapted by an unknown lithographic artist employed by the shop of Tappan & Bradford in Boston for use as a plate in *History of New Ipswich* by Frederic Kidder and Benjamin Gould (Boston: Gould & Lincoln, 1852). On p. vii the authors state that "to Benjamin Champney they are indebted for most of the sketches of landscapes, public buildings, and some private residences," but while Champney provided the source drawings, there is no evidence that he was the artist of execution for the book illustrations. The book contains line cuts and several unsigned lithographs, one of

which is a portrait titled "Benjamin Champney," probably a likeness of the artist's father (1764-1827).

3. *Long Time Ago*. 15 x 18.5. Moore. 1839. "BC" l.r. AAS, BPL.

Title page vignette for "Long Time Ago," a song by "S.P.T." [Samuel Parkman Tuckerman] (Boston: Henry Prentiss, 1839). View of a lake with, at right, a burial monument and a weeping willow.

4. "*Camp Sargent*." *Encampment of the Boston Light Infantry at Springfield, Mass. July 1840*. 27.6 x 39.1. Thayer. 1840. James Burt pinxt. "On stone by B. Champney." l.c. BA.

A view of a militia encampment showing several conical tents and a formation of brightly uniformed militiamen. At lower left a small gathering of local men and women observe the proceedings. James Burt was a painter active 1835-1849 who exhibited at the Boston Athenaeum in 1841 and 1848. George C. Groce and David H. Wallace, *The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America 1564-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 98.

5. *First Church, Medford*. 34 x 43.8. Thayer. ca. 1840. S. Swan del. "On stone by B. Champney." l.c. AAS, BA.

A view of the third meeting-house of Medford, Massachusetts, erected in 1769 and taken down in 1839 by its congregation, the First Parish (Unitarian), in order to erect a new church building on the same site. The newer building, a larger structure in classic revival style, was destroyed by fire in 1893. The origins of the 1769 church shown by Champney are described by Charles Brooks in his *History of the Town of Medford* (Boston: James M. Usher, 1855), pp. 336-338, accompanied (p. 336) by a small wood engraving probably adapted from the Champney view. Samuel Swan, of Oakes & Swan, the music publishers (see item 8), lived next

to the church and evidently supplied Champney with a drawing which served as the basis for the lithograph. The print was published no earlier than May 1840 when the Thayer firm came into being. It seems to have been issued, perhaps by Swan, to record the appearance of a much-loved and recently destroyed building.

"The Towers of Medford," an unsigned article in the *Medford Historical Register* 24(March 1921): 2-4, credits Swan with salvaging the great brass weathercock. The clock in the tower is mentioned as the "village clock" in "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" by Henry W. Longfellow who seems to have been unaware that it was not installed until 1810.

6. *Highland Quick Step*. 29.2 x 24.7 including surround. Sharp & Michelin. Tint. 1840. "B. Champney del." l.l. AAS, BPL, LC (27 Apr 1840).

Title page vignette for "Highland Quick Step," a piano piece by S. Knaebel (Boston: Oakes & Swan, 1840), dedicated to "the officers and members of the Highland Guards," a volunteer militia organization. An officer is shown.

7. *Maritime [sic] Disasters in the Winter of 1839 & 40*. 29.6 x 33.3. Thayer. 1840. "B. Champney del" l.l. AAS.

A print issued by an unknown publisher showing the destruction of eight ships in the winter of 1839-1840, a notably bad season in New England waters. Shown at center is the burning of the steamship *Lexington* in Long Island Sound in January 1840, a disaster also depicted in prints drawn by W.K. Hewitt (for Nathaniel Currier) and John H. Bufford, both published in New York. Champney's view of the *Lexington* is freely adapted from these.

8. *Oakes & Swan, Music Engravers & Publishers*. 18.5 x 13. Unknown printer. ca.

1840. "B. Champney del" *l.l.* AAS.

A trade card for the publishers of some of the music Champney illustrated (6, 12, 13).

9. *The Old Farm Gate*. 13.8 x 12. Thayer. Tint. 1840. "B. Champney del" *l.l.* AAS, LC (4 Dec 1840).

Title page vignette for "The Old Farm Gate," a song by Henry Russell with words by Eliza Cook (Boston: Wm. H. Oakes, 1840). A woman and children at a gate.

10. *The Old Water Mill* [first version]. 14.2 x 11.3. Thayer. Tint. 1840. "B. Champney del" *l.l.* LC (11 Dec 1840).

Title page vignette for "The Old Water Mill," a song by Henry Russell with words by Eliza Cook (Boston: Henry Prentiss, 1840). This picture of a figure contemplating a ramshackle mill was redrawn with minor changes by Champney for a later printing of the song (11).

11. *The Old Water Mill* [second version]. 14 x 11.5. Thayer. 1840 or 1841. "B. Champney del" *l.l.* AAS.

A redrawn of item 9. The foreground figure now appears with a tailed coat.

12. *O Swift We Go. A Sleighing Song*. 9.8 x 14. Unknown printer. Tint. 1840. "B. Champney del" *l.l.* AAS, BPL, LC (28 July 1840).

Title page vignette for "O Swift We Go," a song by Joseph Philip Knight with words by James T. Fields (Boston: Oakes & Swan, 1840). Two boys on a frozen pond wave to passengers in a horse-drawn sleigh.

13. *The Prairie Lea*. 11.5 x 15.5. Sharp & Michelin. Tint. 1840. "B. Champney del." *l.l.* AAS, LC (28 July 1840).

Title page vignette for "The Prairie Lea," a song by Joseph Philip Knight with words by J.K. Mitchell (Boston: Oakes & Swan, 1840). A landscape with a rider and hounds pursuing a stag. The illustration

was redrawn with minor changes by an unsigned artist, probably John H. Bufford, for a later edition of the song.

14. *Rockaway*. 11.2 x 16.5. Thayer. Tint. 1840. "B. Champney" *l.l.* AAS, BPL, LC (13 Nov 1840).

Title page vignette for "Rockaway, or on Old Long Island's Sea-Girt Shore," a song by Henry Russell with words by Henry J. Sharpe (Boston: Wm. Oakes, 1840). A view of Rockaway beach.

15. *View of Rowley Common*. 10.2 x 17.6. Sharp, Michelin & Co. Tint. 1840. "B. Champney del" *l.l.* AAS, BA, BPL.

Frontispiece in Thomas Gage's *History of Rowley* [Mass.]. (Boston: Ferdinand Andrews, 1840).

16. *What's A' The Steer, Kimmer?* 14.8 x 14.8. Thayer. Tint. 1840. "B. Champney" *l.l.* AAS, BPL, LC (8 Feb 1841).

Title page vignette for "What's A' The Steer, Kimmer?," a song by Alexander Lee (Boston: Henry Prentiss, 1840). Two women at the edge of a lake.

17. *Whig Gathering*. 13.2 x 18. Thayer. 1840. "B. Champney del" *l.l.* AAS, LC (8 Feb 1841).

Title page vignette for "Whig Gathering," a song of unknown authorship (Henry Prentiss, 1840) published as a pro-Harrison presidential campaign piece. Champney's view of Faneuil Hall, Quincy Market, and the Old Feather Store is essentially that popularized by the engraving after W.H. Bartlett in N.P. Willis's book *American Scenery* (London: George Virtue; New York: R. Martin, 1840). Champney's view may be based on Bartlett's but it is not a tracing of it nor has Champney made the Old Feather Store as romantically decrepit as Bartlett shows it. The procession of Whigs is entirely original with Champney. This print is no. 13 in A. L. Cummings' list of views of the Old Feather Store, *Old-Time New England* 48(Spring 1958): 85-104.

18. *Lawrence Quadrilles*. 16.4 x 24. Thayer. 1841. "B. Champney del" *l.l.* AAS, BA, BPL, LC (19 March 1841).

Title page vignette for "Lawrence Quadrilles," a collection of piano pieces (Boston: Henry Prentiss, 1841). Shown is the assembly room of Faneuil Hall enlivened by a ball celebrating the inauguration of President Harrison. On the far wall can be seen Henry Sargent's portrait of Peter Faneuil and Gilbert Stuart's of George Washington at Dorchester Heights. The stone was later used with new lettering but with the pictorial vignette unchanged for the title page of "Bay State Quadrilles," for piano by William Glynn (Boston: Henry Prentiss, 1844).

19. *The Old Arm Chair*. 12.5 x 12.2. Thayer. ca. 1841. "B. Champney del." *l.l.* AAS, BPL.

Title page vignette for "The Old Arm Chair," a song by Henry Russell with

words by Eliza Cook, first published in 1840 by Wm. H. Oakes in Boston with a lithograph vignette by Fitz Hugh Lane. Champney copied Lane's illustration closely for the third and fourth editions of the song. A woman is shown leaning against the back of an arm chair.

20. *The Old Sexton*. 15.5 x 11.7. Thayer. Tint. 1841. "B. Champney" *l.l.* AAS, BPL, LC (19 March 1841).

Title page vignette for "The Old Sexton," a song by Henry Russell with words by Park Benjamin (Boston: Henry Prentiss, 1841). A figure by an open grave.

21. *We Were Boys Together*. 14.8 x 11.5. Thayer. Tint. "B. Champney" *l.l.* AAS, BPL, LC (15 Apr 1841).

Title page vignette for "We Were Boys Together," a song by Henry Russell with words by George P. Morris (New York: Firth & Hall, 1841). Two men conversing on a bench under trees.

NOTES

¹ Benjamin Champney, *Sixty Years' Memories of Art and Artists* (Woburn, Mass. [the author], 1900). In his preface, dated 1900, Champney claims that "much of this story was written some six or seven years ago."

² Champney, *Sixty Years'*, pp. 8-15.

³ Champney, pp. 83-84. There is an impression of this print in the Harvard Theatre Collection.

⁴ Five of Champney's White Mountain views were drawn on stone by O. Wallis and published on a single sheet bound with George Bond's *Map of the White Mountains* (Boston, 1853). The lithographs were also used as plates in Benjamin G. Willey's *Incidents in White Mountain History* (Boston: Nathaniel Noyes, 1856). For later printings of this book the views were redrawn on stone, perhaps by Wallis, though his name does not appear on them. A view of Keene, N.H. by Champney was put on stone by an unknown artist at the Bufford shop

in Boston ca. 1850 (AAS). The Prang chromos are listed in Katharine M. McClinton, *The Chromolithographs of Louis Prang* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1973), p. 175.

⁵ A music title designed by W. L. Champney, "Roger's Quick Step," was put on stone by Winslow Homer in 1856 and is reproduced in David Tatham, "Some Apprentice Lithographs of Winslow Homer," *Old-Time New England* 59 (Spring, 1969): 101. An adaptation of the Henry Pelham-Paul Revere *Boston Massacre* by W. L. Champney was put on stone at the Bufford shop in 1856 (impressions AAS, BA), though not necessarily by W. L. Champney himself. His work as a book illustrator is summarized in Sinclair Hamilton, *Early American Book Illustrators and Wood Engravers*, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958 and 1968), I, p. 89 and II, pp. 54-60.

⁶ *New-York Mirror* 19 (28 Aug 1841): 279.