

Training in the Workshop of Abner Reed

DONALD C. O'BRIEN

WHEN John C. Pease and John M. Niles compiled and published their *Gazetteer of the States of Connecticut and Rhode Island* in 1819, they noted that East Windsor, Connecticut, was a small community with slightly over 3,000 inhabitants. Most of these people farmed the fertile soil adjacent to the Connecticut River and lived along the main street, which ran about one mile back and parallel to the mighty watercourse. Pease and Niles also listed numerous commercial businesses that residents operated in addition to farming; these included 'six Gin Distilleries . . . one Segar Manufactory . . . and one extensive and elegant Engraving Establishment.'¹

Documentation for this study appears essentially in three sources. The first, the unpublished diary of John Warner Barber, is at the New Haven Colony Historical Society. Hereafter, it will be cited simply as Barber followed by the date of entry. The other two sources were compiled by the grandson of Abner Reed and the son of Samuel Stiles, Henry Reed Stiles, M.D. The 'Stiles Family Memorial,' on file at the Connecticut Historical Society, is a compilation of family records—letters, trade cards, specimens of bank notes and other copperplate engravings, pictures, etc.—extending through three generations. The 'Memorial' is arranged in four volumes [boxes] and each piece has a page number. It will be cited in this work as SFM, volume, and page number. Finally, there is Henry R. Stiles, *The History and Genealogies of Ancient Windsor, Connecticut, 1635-1891*, 2 vols. (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1891-92), cited as Stiles, volume, and page number. For this study, I have used the facsimile printed by The New Hampshire Publishing Company in 1976. This published source was compiled through letters and other personal records as well as actual conversations with individuals involved. This work will be cited as Stiles, volume, and page number.

1. John C. Pease and John M. Niles, *A Gazetteer of the States of Connecticut and Rhode Island* (Hartford: William S. Marsh, 1819), 65-67. The part of East Windsor where Abner Reed lived was incorporated as South Windsor in 1845.

DONALD C. O'BRIEN edits the *Newsletter* for the American Historical Print Collectors Society. He is also an adjunct faculty member in history at Oakland Community College, Auburn Hills, Michigan.

Copyright © 1995 by American Antiquarian Society

This 'extensive and elegant engraving establishment' was the 'large and well-fitted workshop' of Abner Reed, 'wherein he executed all kinds of jobs in wood and metal, with rare and even tedious accuracy.' He moved his business from Hartford to a location '30 rods south of the meeting house, first society' in the summer of 1811 and remained there for nearly two decades. His shop was located in the second story of an addition running east from his house on the main street. Another addition was made to the north side during the summer of 1818.²

Abner Reed was a transitional figure in American engraving. Trained in the older craft tradition and not satisfied with the old ways, Reed was one of those 'Yankee Dreamers and Doers,' described by Ellsworth Strong Grant,³ who continually sought progress through technological change. He was a pioneer in experimenting with aquatint, and his work in bank note engraving is well known. Reed also trained many of the men who built the great commercial engraving establishments of the mid-nineteenth century. The apprenticeship opportunities offered by Reed were probably not unique, but they are exceptionally well documented.

Born in East Windsor in November 1771, Reed was ninety-four when he died in Toledo, Ohio, in February 1866. His education consisted of a few years in the district school learning the rudiments of reading, writing, spelling, and some arithmetic. At the age of fourteen and in his final year of school, Reed learned the basics of calligraphy by copying German and Old English texts onto paper. This training was extremely helpful and Reed's innate ability can be readily detected in his completed engravings.⁴

After finishing his formal education in 1786, Reed entered into

2. See the announcement in the *Connecticut Mirror*, July 29, 1811, 3:5. A good description of the property is found in Stiles, 2: 635. Barber recorded moving into the new shop, September 16, 1818.

3. Ellsworth Strong Grant, *Yankee Dreamers and Doers* (Chester, Conn.: Pequot Press, [1978]).

4. For a biographical sketch, see Stiles, 2: 634-37 and my article 'Abner Reed: A Connecticut Engraver,' *The Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 44 (January 1979): 1-16.

an apprenticeship with Samuel May, a local saddler and harness maker whose son Charles, seven years Reed's senior, may have taught him the trade. Perhaps they even became friends working side by side, as Charles married Reed's sister Chloe in 1795. While working for the Mays, Reed saw future possibilities for work when observing saddles with engraved plates with the maker's name brought into the shop for repairs. Sometime, probably late in his apprenticeship, he started to use his skills in calligraphy by engraving his own saddle plates. Copper was obtained locally at least once, for the local clockmaker, Daniel Burnap, noted in his account book in April 1791, 'Mr. Charls [sic] May to One Copper plate for Abner Reed.'⁵

When Reed finished his apprenticeship in 1793, he moved to Lansingburgh, New York. This small river community just north of Albany on the east side of the Hudson had attracted many settlers from East Windsor. Quickly Reed found employment teaching school and began his graphic art career by engraving illustrations on copper for area printers. He married Elizabeth Loring in 1795 and they had six children. She died in 1854 after nearly sixty years of marriage.

Sometime in 1797 at his father's request, Reed and his wife returned to East Windsor. He continued to teach school, but according to his carefully kept diary he expanded his business to include 'Painting, engraving bank notes, printing, graining chairs, lettering coffins, cartridges, boxes, engraving frontispieces and farming.'⁶ The diary indicates that he suffered from an erratic income, but eventually bank note engraving became his primary source of cash. At the time Reed also joined the Congregational Church and was soon elected a deacon, a position he maintained for nearly fifty years, and a title he preferred to have used.

5. Cited in Penrose R. Hoopes, *Shop Records of Daniel Burnap, Clockmaker* ([Hartford]: The Connecticut Historical Society, 1958), 21.

6. Unpublished manuscript on file at The Connecticut Historical Society. For a description of the diary, see Thompson R. Harlow, 'Connecticut Engravers, 1774-1820,' *The Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 36 (October 1971): 111-12.

Toward the end of 1803 Reed moved his shop to Hartford, a city which had become a significant publishing and printing center by the early nineteenth century. He advertised in the *American Mercury* that he was engaged in 'Copperplate & Typographical Engraving, Rolling-Press Printing, Sign Painting, Gilding, etc.' In the same advertisement, he stated that he was looking for 'an apprentice to all or any of the above branches, a Lad of from 14 to 16 or 17 years old, of good morals and bright genius.'⁷ Over the years he trained a number of young men who made names for themselves as engravers.

Among the earliest apprentices was Asaph Willard (1786-1880). He became competent in the field of bank note engraving and worked for his former master on and off after completing his apprenticeship. In partnership with other engravers trained by Reed, including Ralph Rawdon (d. c. 1877), he made significant contributions in the field through the formation of various companies which improved the quality and sophistication of bank note and pictorial engraving.⁸ Although Rawdon and Willard are known today for their work on copper plates, Reed also trained them in the basics of wood engraving. At a later time Reed's process of making relief cuts was described: 'The blocks of [a] pear tree at that date were coated with India Ink, the outline put on in red chalk and the picture revealed itself as the engraver progressed in his work.'⁹

Another apprentice in the Reed workshop in the first decade of the nineteenth century was William Mason (c. 1790-c. 1844). Engraving on wood became his medium after he became intrigued with the wood engravings of Alexander Anderson. After careful study he made his initial attempt in 1808 by engraving

7. Hartford, November 17, 1803, 3: 4. This advertisement is reproduced in Harlow, 'Connecticut Engravers,' 112.

8. Rawdon's link to Reed is ambiguous. Barber, August 25, 1820, noted 'R. Rawdon came,' but there is no mention of his being at the Reed residence during his apprenticeship. However, Stiles listed him as a Reed apprentice. For Willard, see his death notice in the *Providence Journal*, July 16, 1880. The same notice, somewhat abbreviated, appeared in the *American Art Review* 1 (1880): 455.

9. *Ibid.*

book illustrations. Mason moved to Philadelphia after completing his apprenticeship in 1810. Apparently he gave up engraving sometime after 1830 to become a drawing teacher.¹⁰

Reed also needed a plate printer, and this job fell to William Phelps (1785–1858). Little is known about Phelps or whether he ever completed an apprenticeship. However, he remained Reed's press operator for a number of years, and it was Phelps who accompanied his employer in early June 1811 to see about moving back to East Windsor, a feat accomplished the following month. Phelps became more than a simple laborer in the workshop when in 1813 he married Chloe Reed May, the daughter of Reed's late sister and Charles May, the son of Abner Reed's former master.¹¹

The specific reasons for moving back to East Windsor are unknown, but several factors may have prompted Reed. Operating in Hartford had to be costlier; he probably arranged with Charles Hosmer (1785–1871), publisher of the *Connecticut Mirror*, to become his agent and stock his inventory of drawing books, school certificates, and pictures. New orders could be easily sent to East Windsor only six miles away and on a direct stage route.¹² Undoubtedly, Reed needed some farmland for his family's needs and a larger building which could provide a workshop as well as living space. The welfare of his parents may have been a major consideration, as they resided with him until their deaths a few years later.

William Phelps, as well as Asaph Willard, followed Reed across the river. Again there was a need for someone to run errands, help out with the chores, and work in the shop at assigned tasks while

10. See William Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, 2 vols. (New York, 1834; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 2, part one: 228.

11. Sometime in 1971, a lady sent to The Connecticut Historical Society a photocopy of two leaves from a day book kept by her great-grandfather, William Phelps. These cover the periods from May 24 through June 25, 1811 and from August 10 through September 10, 1812. In addition to the entry for June 7, 1811, 'Went to EW with Mr. Reed to see about moving,' Phelps wrote on September 8, 1812, 'Helped Willard print new blocks.' Unfortunately, this woman did not include her address so CHS was unable to respond. Letter from Thompson R. Harlow, November 29, 1983, to Donald C. O'Brien. Phelps's marriage is confirmed in *Diary of Thomas Robbins, D.D. 1796–1854*, Increase N. Tarbox ed., 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1886), 1: 550.

12. See the advertisement in the *Connecticut Mirror*, July 29, 1811, 3: 5.

learning the trade. Hence Reed started looking for young apprentices. His first choice was a son of a local elder, Captain Asahel Stiles. When making his offer, Reed shrewdly argued, 'I cannot think that I can make it at all advantageous to myself.'¹³ He agreed, however, to take the boy provided the father would pay for clothing and board for the first year. Later a second son entered the workshop. Obviously, Reed did not want to make any investment until the young man proved himself. He continued, 'A long time is required in learning to draw, which is absolutely necessary in the first place, and a long time to practice engraving before anything can be done at customer's work, and much time spent in instruction, etc.'¹⁴

After stating that an apprenticeship required seven years, Reed further promised '... to do well by him in instructing and treatment, and should we both live till his apprenticeship expires, I shall probably be willing to give him good wages for any time he may wish to stay with me afterwards.'¹⁵ Stiles's son Samuel (1796-1861) was greatly influenced by his master, but it is very probable that his older brother, Asahel Chapin Stiles (1793-1866), also went to Reed. If Asahel did not enter into a formal apprenticeship, he at least worked in Reed's workshop for several years.¹⁶

The following year Reed made another excellent choice in accepting into his shop John Warner Barber (1798-1885), the future engraver, topographical draughtsman, and historian. Recently left fatherless, Barber needed a guardian while Reed needed a worker. It was an ideal solution for both. As soon as he began his apprenticeship on January 22, 1813, Barber started keeping a diary, probably at Reed's suggestion, and continued it until his death in 1885. Although extremely cryptic and lacking description or analysis, it gives the reader a glimpse into Barber's daily routine, especially during the seven years of service under Abner Reed.¹⁷

13. SFM, 2: 69.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. See the Stiles genealogy in Stiles, 2: 711-12.

17. For more information on Barber, see my article 'John Warner Barber: A

Barber came from Windsor on the other side of the river,¹⁸ so it must have been a novelty in the beginning to run the errands. He went frequently to such places as the mill 'upon the Hill,' to 'Pitkin's [Glass] Factory,' and as far away as East Hartford. Chores were plentiful as well—'loading sand and dung,' 'working in the garden,' 'pitching hay,' and 'piling up wood.' During July, he was loaned out for a week to reap grain at the farm of Reed's brother. For the Sabbath, Barber simply made the notation 'Sunday' at first, but as he grew older he included biblical quotations, where he attended church, and usually the name of the preacher. Of course, there was never any mention of work on Sunday, not even chores.

Within a fortnight Barber established a pattern that lasted a lifetime. He engraved daily, usually in the morning, or he spent his time drawing—occasionally listing his subjects, beasts and birds, maps, and even 'Dr. Franklin's head.' There is no mention of what he was engraving at this initial stage so it can be assumed that he was simply practicing. Whether he received direct instruction is also unknown; perhaps he was expected to teach himself by observation and practice, and his instruction was limited to casual suggestions from his master.

Barber also learned the dirtier side of the trade as 'The copperplates were taken in the rough sheet, hammered, stoned, polished and burnished by the young men.'¹⁹ These were tasks frequently mentioned in the diary. He was also printing—'Helped Mr. Phelps print bank bills,' 'Printed watch cards,' 'Printed certificates,' or 'Printing Washington 1000 [copies].' At the same

Connecticut Engraver,' *Imprint* 4 (April 1979), 20–22; Richard Hegel, *Nineteenth-Century Historians of New Haven* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1972), 32–50; Chauncey C. Nash, 'John Warner Barber and his Books,' *Walpole Society Note Book* (1934) 5–35; Henry H. Townshend, 'John Warner Barber, Illustrator and Historian,' *Papers of the New Haven Colony Historical Society* 10 (1951): 313–36; and Christopher P. Bickford and J. Bard McNulty eds., *John Warner Barber's Views of Connecticut Towns, 1834–1836* ([Hartford]: The Acorn Club, [1990]).

18. It has often been stated that Barber was born in East Windsor, but Stiles, 2: 54, shows that his father Elijah resided in Windsor and that is where his mother lived throughout his apprenticeship.

19. *Providence Journal*, July 16, 1880.

time, he was binding and trimming copies, or 'colouring clock faces' and 'painting frontispieces.'

Barber also noted exceptions to his routine. For example, he visited his family about six times a year. When allowed to go home, he generally left on Saturday afternoon, spent Sunday with his family, and returned Monday morning. In the beginning he usually went directly home across the river by Bissell's Ferry; as he grew older, however, he sometimes 'Returned by Hartford 17 miles' as he did on Christmas Day 1815. Sometimes he tarried in Hartford and spent his time there attending religious meetings or going to the museum.²⁰

He also recorded the comings and goings of household help. The Reed household was probably in need of continual help providing for six children plus the apprentices in Mrs. Reed's care. Abner Reed's guests were also noted in the diary. On May 11, 1813, Barber wrote that 'Mr. Kensett and his wife came.' No doubt this was the engraver, Thomas Kensett (1786-1829), a partner in the firm of Shelton & Kensett, map and print publishers, and father of John Frederick Kensett (1816-72), landscape painter and engraver.

It has been assumed that Ralph Rawdon worked for Shelton & Kensett because his engraving, *Col. Johnsons mounted men charging a party of British Artillerists & Indians, at the Battle fought near Moravian Town October 2nd 1813*, was published and sold by Shelton & Kensett of Cheshire, Connecticut, in 1813 (fig. 1). This may not be the case, because Barber noted in September that 'Ralph got home' and a week later he wrote 'Printing certificates with Ralph.' These entries lead one to believe that Rawdon did the actual engraving in Reed's workshop. Hence Reed may have been doing business with Shelton & Kensett all along, and the Kensetts' visit that spring may have been for business reasons.

In his seven years at the Reed household, Barber mentioned

20. Undoubtedly this was the museum of Joseph Steward (1753-1822), portrait painter and silhouettist. See Thompson R. Harlow, 'The Versatile Joseph Steward, Portrait Painter and Museum Proprietor,' *Antiques* 121 (January 1982): 303-11.



Fig. 1. Col. Johnsons mounted men charging a party of British Artillerists & Indians, at the Battle fought near Moravian Town October 2nd 1813. when the whole of the British force commanded by Gen. Procter, surrendered to the Army under Gen. Harrison and his gallant followers. Published and sold by Shelton & Kensett Con. Dec 6th 1813. Engraved by R. Rawdon. The Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut.

reading only three books, which is probably not a reflection on his interest but merely an indication of the limited amount of reading material in circulation at the time. Of course, his reading would have been enhanced by the reading of scripture in church and by the numerous materials to be engraved and printed that went through the Reed workshop.²¹

The second year into his apprenticeship found Barber no longer running errands; obviously there was a younger boy in the workshop fulfilling this task. However, he was still responsible for many chores. Often he commented that he worked in the garden or became more specific by remarking, 'hoed beans,' 'raking hay

21. Barber, March 24-31, 1813, 'Reading Stranger in Ireland,' July 25, 1817, 'Reading The Christian Memoir,' and March 15, 1818, 'Read Cotton Mather's Life.'

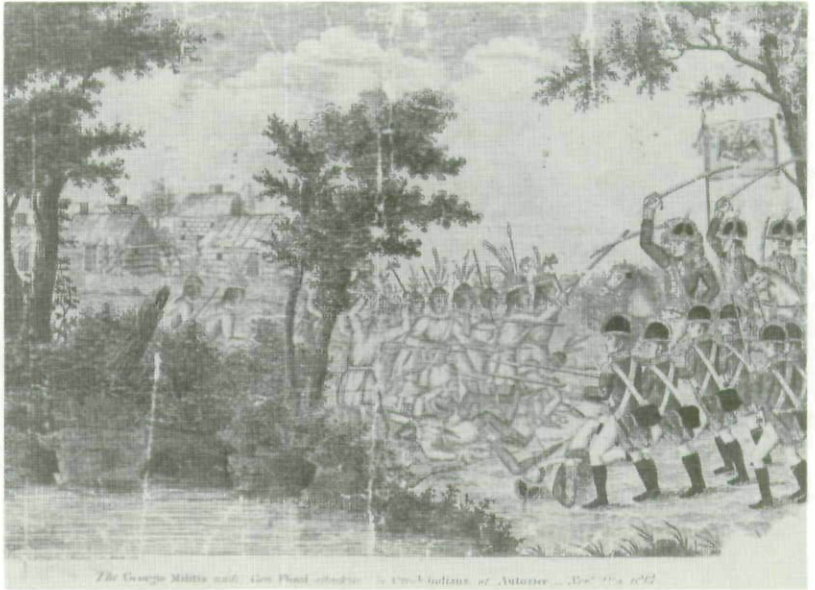


Fig. 2. *The Georgia Militia under Gen. Floyd attacking the Creek Indians at Autosee—Novr. 29th 1813.* Published by W. Phelps & Co. E. Windsor Con. March 1814. The Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut.

with Asahel in the meadow,' 'picking over potatoes,' or 'went after walnuts.'

Barber was now engraving daily with intermittent breaks, and occasionally he revealed his subject matter. New Year's Day of 1814 found him engraving a Washington plate which was probably one of the two different engravings of the first President produced by Reed. Over the winter Barber also drew, engraved, scoured, and burnished a plate of a battle. There is no mention of printing, but he did color a finished print. Undoubtedly, this was *The Georgia Militia under Gen. Floyd attacking the Creek Indians at Autosee—Novr. 29th 1813* (fig. 2). Although completed in the Reed workshop, the imprint reads 'Published by W. Phelps & Co. E. Windsor Con. March 1814.' For some unknown reason, Reed allowed a print engraved in his shop to be published under the name of his plate printer and nephew-in-law.

Another print of this period from Barber's hand, was *Commodore Perry's Victory, on Lake Erie, Over the British Fleet, commanded by Commodore Barclay, Sept. 10th 1813*. Barber noted that he drew and engraved the plate in the last week of March, and it was printed with the caption, 'Published by A. Reed & Co. E. Windsor Con. April 1814.' This print has survived in two states. One bears the initials JWB below the engraving in the right hand corner; the other is blank in that area.²²

Although Barber became well known as a historical writer who illustrated his books with his own woodcuts, he apparently never experimented nor needed to work with this medium until well into his second year. Furthermore, there are very few notations in his diary during the years of his apprenticeship where he mentioned engraving on wood. Usually he engraved on copper.

Barber did his share of printing. He made entries, 'printed copies [certificates],' 'printing pictures with Loring,' or 'printing watch cards Huntington & Church.' Also he 'bound & trimmed [D] books,' 'bound copies,' or 'stitched and trimmed.' Miscellaneous entries such as 'Engraving watch plate Wilmington NC' or 'Counting Bills' clearly indicate that he was becoming extremely competent, and Reed now was assigning him more responsible tasks. During intervals when Barber was not engraving, he helped with rush orders. For instance, most of the month of March 1814 he colored maps that a Mr. [Markel] picked up personally on the 26th. This must have been Reed's map depicting Napoleon's retreat from Russia, a popular topic of conversation of the time.²³

Barber's third year in the trade showed little change. That particular year he still worked in the garden at peak times, did odd jobs around the shop, and made it a point to note that he went after shad when they were running heavily in the river. Otherwise,

22. This engraving, illustrated in Irving S. Olds, *Bits and Pieces of American History* (New York: Privately printed, 1951), 220, lacks the initials JWB whereas a copy at the Connecticut Historical Society contains them.

23. *A Map of Europe In which are delineated the rout of the French Army, to & from Moscow, in the Campaign of 1812—That of the Campaign of 1813; and also, that of Ld. Wellington's Army in Spain*, Published by A. Reed & Co. E Windsor Con. Mar: 1814.

he continued the usual activities—engraving, drawing, scouring and burnishing plates, printing, and binding and trimming. As usual he journeyed home frequently and continued to record the arrivals and departures of visitors, workers, and the young ladies of the house.

John Warner Barber celebrated his eighteenth birthday on February 2, 1816, by sticking to his daily routine; during the evening, however, he 'Watched with Mr. Loomis.' Now he was of sufficient age to endure the morbid responsibility of sitting with a person near death. He did this several times in 1816, including twice in the Reed household. The elder Mrs. Reed died on February 8, and she was followed by Abner Reed's sister-in-law two weeks later. Two years later Barber sat with the elder Mr. Reed before he succumbed.

However, there were apparently many happy moments now. That year he attended meetings of an unknown nature, but they were probably church related as they were held at the home of a local deacon. Perhaps there was a young lady in Barber's life now, because he attended singing school through the winter of 1817 and took dancing lessons. These activities must have been a pleasant break from the daily round of chores and shop work. They also provided an escape from the confinement of a crowded household.

Responsibilities in the shop multiplied as well; in late 1815 Reed received a major commission from Barber Badger, the Boston publisher, to engrave plates for his proposed book, *The Naval Temple* (fig. 3).²⁴ Reed delegated to Barber the engraving on copper of at least three scenes and the frontispiece. Elkanah Tisdale (1768–1835), a Connecticut designer then living in Boston, drew the frontispiece, and Michel Felice Corné (c. 1752–1845), a marine painter known for his scenes of the War of 1812, completed the drawings for the rest of the plates.

Barber recorded in his diary that he started working on the project in December; at that time he was 'Engraving Battle of Lake

24. (Boston: Barber Badger, 1816).

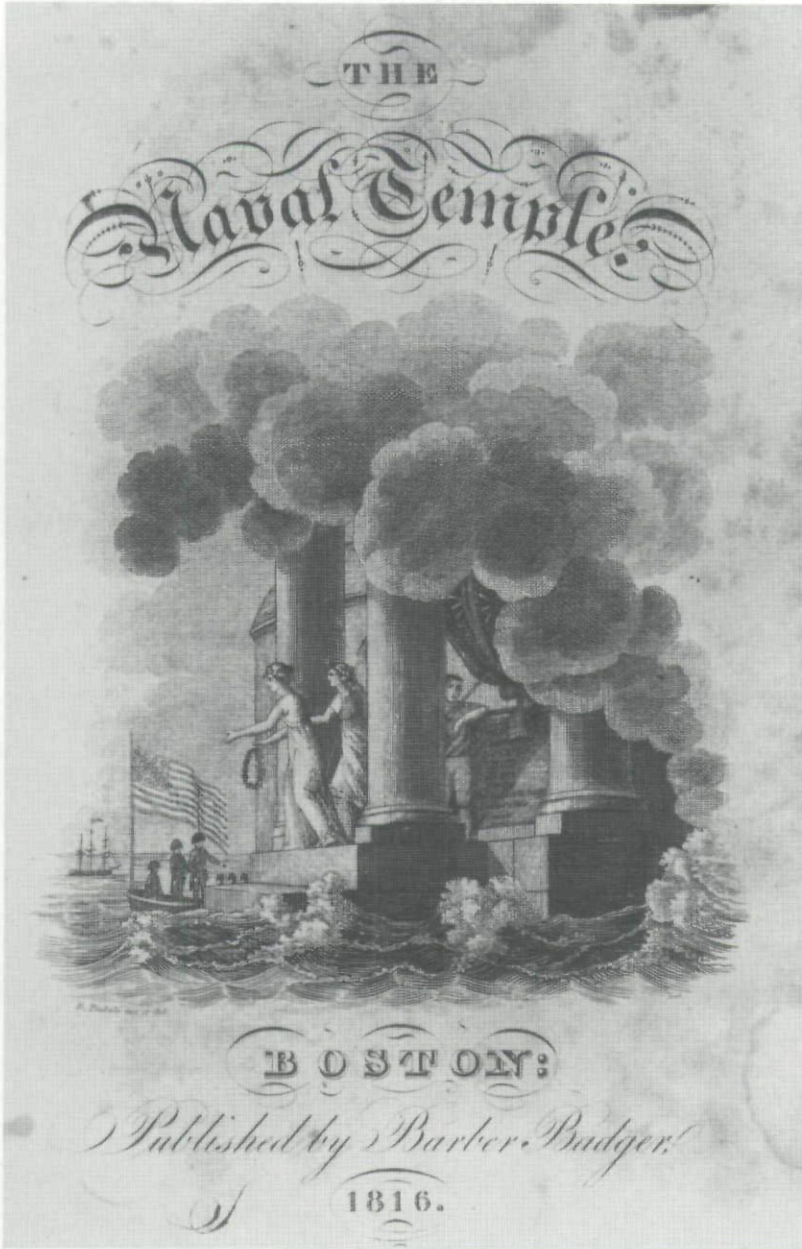


Fig. 3. *The Naval Temple*. E. Tisdale inv. & del. Reed, Rawdon, Wright & Co., New York. American Antiquarian Society.



Fig. 4. *Battle of Plattsburg*. Read sc. American Antiquarian Society.

Champlain.' He did not record when he finished this plate, but he was working on the 'Battle of Plattsburg,' on January 2, 1816, and finished it eleven days later. On both plates the name of the engraver is misspelled 'Read' (fig. 4); and most copies lack the name of a printer or publisher incised into the plates. However, there is a second state of the 'Battle of Plattsburg' with the caption, 'Printed by Saml Maverick N.Y.'

Possibly Barber was instructed to leave these plates unsigned in order to allow Samuel Maverick (1789–1845) to fill in this information; and when adding Reed's name, Maverick simply misspelled it. Misspelling the name, Reed, was probably a common occurrence. Daniel Burnap, Abner Reed's neighbor, made an entry in his account book for June 1791, also spelling the name Read, and then three months later he spelled it correctly. Also William Dunlap, in his *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, spelled it Reid.²⁵

²⁵ Hoopes, *Shop Records of Daniel Burnap*, 21; Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design*, 2: 47.

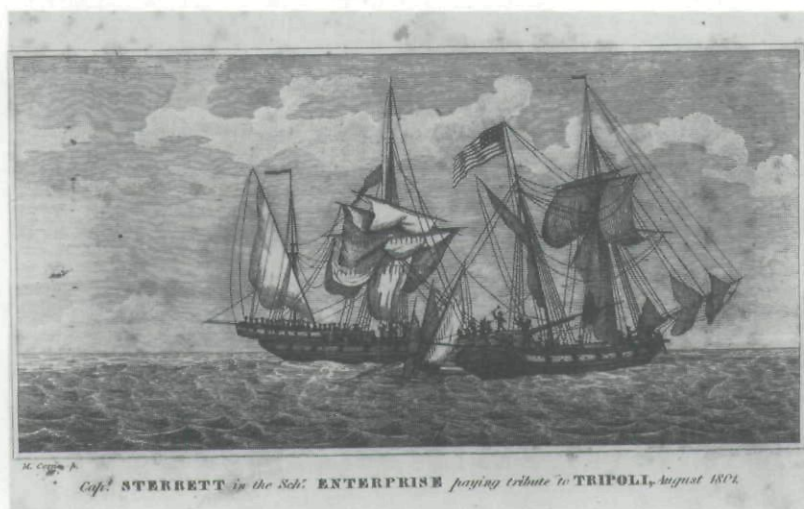


Fig. 5. *Capt Sterrett in the Schr Enterprise paying tribute to Tripoli, August 1801. M. Corné. American Antiquarian Society*

This becomes comprehensible when another print in the series is examined: 'Capt Sterrett in the Schr Enterprise paying tribute to Tripoli, August 1801' (fig. 5). Barber was working on this plate on the first of May and engraved the painter's name, M. Corné, but left the rest of the acknowledgement blank. The engraving was undoubtedly finished when Badger arrived in East Windsor on May 18. No doubt he carried this plate to New York where Maverick, probably under pressure to finish the job, neglected to add the engraver's name. Barber started working on the Tisdale frontispiece May 31 and finished it June 7. This engraving has the name Reed spelled correctly, along with that of Tisdale as artist, which certainly indicates that Barber also engraved the names into the plate.

Bank note engraving accounted for a large percentage of Reed's business. Reed's grandson, Henry Reed Stiles, noted many years later that lacking modern technology 'Laborious hand work was not relieved, as at present, by curious mechanism; the old "pull" hand-press alone was used, and the printed sheets of bank-notes

were sun-dried on clothes lines in the Deacon's back yard!²⁶ Obviously there were many 'tricks of the trade' to acquire before one felt sufficiently competent to engrave notes difficult to counterfeit. Barber had done his homework by spending many months assisting in the preparation of plates; by the summer of 1816, the young apprentice had picked up sufficient 'tricks' to go to work on his own.

Barber devoted most of his time to bank notes throughout the rest of his apprenticeship in Reed's workshop. He frequently made entries such as 'drawing device for Hartford Bank' or 'Engraved bank plate.' Sometimes he noted the denomination, 'Engraved Mechanics 20 dol,' or 'Engraved Phenix bk NY 3 dol.' Customers included banks throughout New England, New York, and Canada. At this time, Reed was travelling extensively. Moreover, he was a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives from East Windsor in 1817 and 1818 which accounts for some of his absences.²⁷ Who was in charge in his absence is unknown, but there is little doubt that he had complete confidence and trust in John Warner Barber, a senior apprentice as well as an accomplished engraver.

Abner Reed's workshop must have been a place of experimentation, where tinkering was encouraged, an environment where the perfection of new technology was attempted, especially in trying to thwart counterfeiters. East Windsor had already produced two Yankees of genius, John Fitch (1743-96) and Eli Terry (1772-1852), and a case could be easily developed that Reed was the third. Fitch, an experimenter in steam-driven boats, shared a common ancestry with Reed, whose mother was a Fitch. Reed may have even known Fitch when the latter resided for a brief time in East Windsor in the mid 1790s. And Eli Terry, the first American to produce clocks in volume, was a contemporary of Reed. He was completing an apprenticeship under Daniel Burnap

26. Stiles, 2: 635.

27. See *Roll of State Officers and Members of the General Assembly of Connecticut from 1776 to 1881* (Hartford, 1881).

while Reed was down the street doing the same under Samuel May.²⁸

While Fitch and Terry left their hometown, Reed returned to make his contribution. John Warner Barber, Samuel Stiles, and other young apprentices must have been part of the team that developed the technology to produce sophisticated currency difficult to counterfeit. By 1820 they had produced a complete and different set of dies for each denomination from one to ten dollars.²⁹ Hence a counterfeiter could not duplicate a plate and quickly change the denomination; he would have to make a separate plate for each.

By this time, Reed's notes had been examined in England, along with notes from his local competitor the Hartford Graphic Company. The British examiners found both to be '... decidedly superior to any engravings of the kind we have ever seen.'³⁰ The English were also impressed with the high quality of the paper manufactured by the Hartford firm of Hudson and Company.³¹ Abner Reed was undoubtedly the driving force—another Yankee genius, a master who oversaw his shop—leading Barber, Stiles, and the other apprentices in the development of new technology.

Barber also developed the habit of recording the names of individuals who worked in the shop; thus a fairly comprehensive list of these men is known today. Two boys whose names are not known followed Barber before Reed's oldest son, Abner Loring (1800–89), started in 1814. Whether he learned to engrave is unknown because Barber only mentioned his work at the press. Loring worked for Balch & Stiles in Utica and was involved with his father in East Windsor as late as 1834, when he moved with his wife to Conneaut, Ohio.³²

Vistus Balch (1799–1884), a future engraver and portrait

28. For Fitch, see Stiles, 2: 263–68, and for Terry, 2: 751–52.

29. This was the claim made in a circular announcing the formation of Reed & Stiles in January 1821. A copy is at the Connecticut Historical Society.

30. *Connecticut Mirror*, February 1, 1819, 2: 3.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Stiles, 2: 639 and Barber, December 22, 1814.

draughtsman on stone, arrived February 1, 1815. According to the diary, 'Balch went home [April] 27th.' Barber did not offer any explanation for his departure, but it can be safely assumed that a conflict developed between master and employee. Yet Balch must have made friends there during his short stay and somehow learned the trade. From 1822 to 1826 he was in business in Albany, New York, with another former Reed apprentice, Ralph Rawdon, as Balch, Rawdon, and Company.

Two years later Balch and Samuel Stiles decided to take advantage of new business opportunities created by the opening of the Erie Canal. They opened a shop in Utica advertising 'Copperplate Printing neatly executed,' but the partnership lasted only a couple of years.³³ Apparently there was little business and they had difficulty getting supplies. For example, they waited weeks for a shipment of copper from Philadelphia to fulfill a map order. Help was also a problem and they were in need of a plate printer. The partners considered sending for William Phelps 'If we were sure of work to keep him in constant employ.'³⁴ Apparently they decided that there was insufficient work, as there was no further mention of bringing Phelps west.

They did business with the Utica Bank but ironically only with the help of their former mentor. Stiles wrote Reed on October 2, 1824, that they were asked by a Mr. Hunt, the bank's cashier, 'Can you make a copy or facsimile of one of our plates with the old die of Murray, Draper & Co?' They assured him that 'Mr. Reed had the plates to do the job.'³⁵ Stiles requested the needed plate and argued that Mr. Hunt's influence was crucial in securing business from other western banks. In late November Stiles wrote Reed again complaining that they had not received the plate and wrote further, 'Without the plate . . . it would be a death blow to all our hopes of work from that Bank.'³⁶ Finally by Christmas the plate

33. A sample of their tradecard is located in SFM, 1: 102.

34. Letter from Samuel Stiles to Abner Reed, September 21, 1824, SFM, 1: 76.

35. SFM, 1: 79.

36. SFM, 1: 80.

had been sent and received; by then they had gotten more business through Balch's effort in a trip west to secure orders.

Orders, however, must have been insufficient and the logistics of doing business in a new town overwhelming. Relations between Balch and Reed were still strained even though Reed's assistance was necessary; and no doubt homesickness was a factor for Stiles. In June 1825 he returned to East Windsor and married Reed's daughter, Charlotte Sophia. Stiles returned with his bride to Utica, but by August he was already considering moving back to Hartford.³⁷

After experiencing another winter in the west, Balch was ready to move to New York City. Stiles wrote to his brother that 'He [Balch] has made it [such a move] in contemplation for some time.' At the moment Stiles wanted him to remain, as business must have picked up. He wrote further, 'He does not leave here now, for the want of employment but he has more ambition for Fame than I have, and that is the only field [meaning New York City] to acquire it.'³⁸ The relationship between Balch and Stiles remained cordial despite the dissolution of their Utica partnership. After Stiles followed Balch to New York, they renewed their business association by opening an office on Wall Street.³⁹

Samuel Stiles may have been Abner Reed's favorite apprentice, for there are engravings bearing the inscription 'Reed & Stiles sc,' from 1819, the year Stiles completed his apprenticeship. The official announcement of the partnership did not occur until 1821, when they opened a shop in rooms Reed had rented in Hartford. Also Reed might have wanted to help his future son-in-law get off to a good start. Another reason for their partnership could be that Stiles was the 'genius,' along with Reed, who made significant improvements in engraved bank notes. Whatever the reason, bank note engraving became the firm's specialty, although they continued to produce engravings for such publications as Silliman's *American Journal of Science* and woodcuts for numerous Hartford printers.

37. Robbins, 1: 1006 and SFM, 1: 86.

38. SFM, 1: 91.

39. See tradecard of Balch, Stiles & Co., SFM, 1: 104.

From Utica, Samuel Stiles moved to New York City where he settled permanently. Besides continuing an affiliation with Balch, he also formed the partnership of S. Stiles, Sherman & Smith.⁴⁰ Later he was employed with Danforth, Wright and Company until they merged with several others to form the American Bank Note Company in 1858. A year later, Stiles wrote, 'I have disconnected myself from those with whom I have so long been connected and also with the great Am Bk Note Company and am now about to begin life anew at the age of 63 years.'⁴¹ That new life was with other colleagues who became disenchanted with the American Bank Note Company. These individuals formed the National Bank Note Company, and Stiles became the firm's treasurer and general clerk at an annual salary of \$500.00. His new life was short-lived, however, for he died in 1861.⁴²

When Stiles moved to Utica, the Hartford office was turned over to Oliver Pelton (1798-1882), another former Reed apprentice. Pelton had been working there well before the formation of Reed, Stiles & Co., for Barber visited him there in 1820.⁴³ After Stiles's departure, Pelton became a partner, and the firm's name changed to Reed, Stiles, Pelton & Company, although there were still accounts under the former name of the firm. By spring of 1826 Stiles complained to Reed that Pelton was not paying the bills.⁴⁴ Pelton apparently had a lifelong problem handling money. Barber recorded a year earlier, 'Lent O. Pelton 2 dols,' which he never mentioned having been repaid.⁴⁵ Later in his career while living in Boston, Pelton had financial problems with his partner, William D. Terry.⁴⁶ The problem over Pelton's management was probably the death knell of Reed, Stiles, Pelton and Company.

40. See circular in SFM, 1: 111.

41. SFM, 2: 140.

42. SFM, 2: 141.

43. Banknotes have survived with only the names Reed & Pelton. The Rhode Island Historical Society has several of them.

44. SFM, 1: 93.

45. Barber, September 15, 1825.

46. See 'Letters from a Bank Note Engraver to his Partner: Oliver Pelton to William D. Terry, 1834,' *Essay Proof Journal* 68 (1960): 155-62.

This firm simply went out of business; whether the company's debts were ultimately honored is unknown.

Ebenezer Fitch Reed (1799–1832), a nephew, and Frederick Bissell (1799–1870) became friends while serving their apprenticeships. In early 1821 they established Reed & Bissell in New York City, and advertised as bank note engravers and printers.⁴⁷ They also produced watch papers, but nothing else is known about their affairs.⁴⁸ In the autumn of 1824 their business was not faring well when Samuel Stiles visited them on his way to Utica. He wrote to Reed that 'I found Frederick and Eben well but with little business. . . . Frederick is dissatisfied with the business and his prospects and [I] believe determined on quitting it if he can find other employment.'⁴⁹ The business did collapse; Frederick Bissell went on to have a distinguished career as a merchant in Toledo, Ohio.⁵⁰ Ebenezer Fitch Reed stayed on in New York City and died there in 1832.⁵¹

John S. Horton (c. 1802–c. 1853) was a shadowy figure who joined the Reed workshop in 1815.⁵² He is listed in the Providence directories of 1824, 1826, and 1828, but he was in that city as early as 1823 when he engraved the plates for *A Complete System of Stenography* by Jonathan Dodge. His advertisement, appearing in only the 1824 directory, focused on engraving and copperplate printing, but it also stated that he had a good stock of superior quality bank note paper. Sometime after 1828 he moved to Baltimore, where he is listed in that city's directories from 1837 to 1845. His name is next found in the New York City directories (1846–53) before he finally disappears.⁵³

47. A sample bank note is reproduced in E. Sherry McFowble, *Two Centuries of Prints in America, 1680–1880: A Selective Catalogue of the Winterthur Museum Collection* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987), 502.

48. See Dorothea F. Spear, 'American Watch Papers with a Descriptive List in the American Antiquarian Society,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 61 (October 1951), 349.

49. SFM, 1: 76.

50. For a biographical sketch see Stiles, 2: 90.

51. Stiles, 2: 634.

52. 'John S. Horton came.' Barber, October 23, 1815.

53. See 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), 327.

Alfred Daggett (1799–1872), eventually a New Haven engraver of portraits and bank notes, arrived in East Windsor in November 1817.⁵⁴ He and Barber became friends and joined the Methodist Church together in 1821. Later in New Haven, they had shops in the same building. Daggett had the distinction of being the uncle and first teacher of John Frederick Kensett.

Louis Fairchild (1801–80) started his apprenticeship with Asaph Willard in New Haven, but spent some time in Reed's shop before moving on to the Hartford Graphic & Bank Note Company as a draughtsman.⁵⁵ At about the same time he did some miniature painting. Fairchild worked for a brief time in the shop of Balch & Stiles in Utica before moving on to Providence and later Boston.

Reed's 'extensive and elegant engraving establishment,' as aptly described by Pease and Niles, had its share of tradesmen pass through its door. Many names are still familiar to historians of American engraving. Asahel Chapin Stiles is mentioned so often that it is logical to conclude that he and Barber became good friends. Entries such as 'Mr. Phelps got back' or 'Mr. Willard arrived' indicate that men who were a generation older returned when in need of employment.

Barber's apprenticeship, as observed through his diary, undoubtedly reflects common experience. Young men were expected to work arduously through a variety of assignments which avoided the drudgery associated with the factory system of a later era; and, at the same time, they did their share of the chores. Leisure time was granted, and participation in constructive activities was probably encouraged. Abner Reed was a strict Congregationalist and no doubt he expected his men to observe the Sabbath. Thus time was allocated from noon on Saturday to Monday morning, not only to worship but to rest and to visit family.

John Warner Barber left the Reed household after his twenty-first birthday with a letter of endorsement from his master. He

54. 'Alfred Daggett came.' Barber, November 4, 1817.

55. 'Louis Fairchild came.' Barber, June 9, 1817.

lived briefly in Hartford and permanently settled in New Haven in 1823. There he raised a family and worked for over sixty years. He became well known as a historical writer and illustrator of many books. Yet he never forgot the benevolence of his old mentor. Barber often visited Mr. and Mrs. Reed at their East Windsor home, and the elderly couple were frequent house guests of the former apprentice in New Haven over the next thirty years. No wonder that Barber commented in later years 'that he considered it a favorable circumstance that he had been a member of the family of Dea. Abner Reed, where Christian rules were adopted and where its heads felt an interest in the religious welfare of those under their charge,'⁵⁶ undoubtedly a sentiment that would have been echoed by many of the young men who passed through the workshop of Abner Reed.

APPRENTICES IN THE WORKSHOP OF ABNER REED

HARTFORD ERA (1803-1811)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Apprenticeship</i>	<i>Companies</i>	<i>Location</i>
William Mason (c.1796-c.1844)	c. 1803-1810	W. & D. H. Mason W. & A. Mason	Philadelphia
William Phelps (1785-1858)	c. 1803-1810	W. Phelps & Co.	East Windsor
Asaph Willard (1786-1880)	c. 1803-1810	Hartford Graphic Co.	Hartford Providence

EAST WINDSOR ERA (1811-1821)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Apprenticeship</i>	<i>Companies</i>	<i>Location</i>
Vistus Balch (1799-1884)	Feb. 1, 1815- Apr. 27, 1815	Balch, Rawdon & Co. V. Balch & S. Stiles Balch, Stiles & Co. Balch, Stiles, Wright & Co. Balch & Co.	Albany Utica New York New York New York
John Warner Barber (1798-1885)	Jan. 22, 1813- Sept. 1, 1819	Reed & Barber	Hartford New Haven
Frederick Bissell (1799-1870)	Apr. 22, 1816	Reed & Bissell	New York
Alfred Daggett (1799-1872)	Nov. 4, 1817	Daggett & Ely Daggett, Hinman & Co.	New Haven
Lewis Fairchild (1801-c.1880)	June 9, 1817	Hartford Graphic Co. V. Balch & S. Stiles	Hartford Utica Providence Boston
John S. Horton	Oct. 23, 1815		Providence Baltimore New York

<i>Name</i>	<i>Apprenticeship</i>	<i>Companies</i>	<i>Location</i>
Oliver Pelton (1798-1882)	Apr. 4, 1816	Reed & Pelton	Hartford
		Reed, Stiles, Pelton & Co.	Hartford
		Terry, Pelton & Co.	Boston
Ralph Rawdon (c.1800-c.1877)		Balch, Rawdon & Co.	Albany
		Rawdon, Clark & Co.	Albany
		Rawdon, Wright & Co.	New York
		Rawdon, Wright & Hatch	New York
		Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson	New York
		American Bank Note Co.	New York
Abner Loring Reed (1800-1889)	Dec. 22, 1814	Balch & Stiles	Utica
Ebenezer F. Reed (1799-1832)	Oct. 24, 1815	Reed & Bissell	New York
Elisha [Sill]	Mar. 20, 1813		
Asahel C. Stiles (1793-1866)	1812		
Samuel Stiles (1796-1861)	1812	Reed & Stiles	Hartford
		Reed, Stiles, Pelton & Co.	Hartford
		V. Balch & S. Stiles	Utica
		Balch, Stiles & Co.	New York
		Balch, Stiles, Wright & Co.	New York
		S. Stiles & Co.	New York
		S. Stiles, Sherman & Smith	New York
		Danforth, Wright & Co.	New York
		American Bank Note Co.	New York
		National Bank Note Co.	New York
Julius Thompson	May 5, 1813	publisher of the <i>Connecticut Mirror</i>	

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.