What He Did For Love: David Claypoole Johnston and the Boston Irish, 1825-1865

David Claypoole Johnston was an engraver, artist, and satirical commentator on American life, who can reasonably be called the best known and most popular American graphic artist of the first half of the nineteenth century (fig. 1). Born in Philadelphia, he apprenticed there, and moved to Boston in 1825, living and working in the city until his death in 1865. The cartoons, prints, and yearly satiric periodicals on which his contemporary reputation as “the famous caricature designer” rested were advertised, editorially noted, and sometimes extensively reviewed in the Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore and Charleston newspapers. Their circulation reached considerably farther—throughout the smaller cities of New England (Portland, Portsmouth, Providence, and Hartford)—and at times to Savannah, Cincinnati, and New Orleans. Love and marriage pulled this Protestant artisan and satirist, born into a family of performers, into the orbit of Boston’s tight-knit yet marginal Irish and Catholic community.

David Claypoole Johnston was no Irishman, but he married into the clan, and thereby hangs this tale. His own ethnicity was Scottish and English. Born in Philadelphia in 1798, he was the child of an Englishwoman, the young former actress Charlotte Rowson (the sister of the author Susanna Rowson), and William P. Johnston, an accountant, bookkeeper, and devotee of the stage, whose ancestors had come to New Jersey in the early eighteenth century from southern England and from Edinburgh in Scotland. Charlotte had been baptized in the Church of England, and by the mid-eighteenth century, members of the Johnston family were being married in the Anglican Church and buried in the Anglican cemetery. Indeed, Johnston’s great-grandfather, a Scotsman born in Edinburgh, had sought out the Anglican rather than the Presbyterian church when he arrived

in his new homeland.

After their marriage, William and Charlotte became parishioners of old St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. Given Philadelphia's high ethnic diversity by early American standards, David would have known a number of people of Irish descent, and more than a few Catholics; working as he did in the book trades, he surely would have known of, and perhaps met, the great publisher and printer Matthew Carey, the city's most famous and successful Irish Catholic. Johnston's master in the engraving trade, Francis Kearny, was himself the descendant of Irish Catholics who had come to New Jersey, but his family had shed its ancestral faith within a generation, also becoming Anglicans.

There is no reason to suspect Johnston of piety in his early life. He was a caricaturist from the time he could hold a pencil, and in his youth an accomplished mimic, an amateur musician with a predilection for comic songs, and as he recalled, "a nice man for a party." His autobiography makes no mention of religious feeling or religious matters, and none of the work that he produced in Philadelphia between 1815 and 1825 had any religious content. Out of this religious genealogy, we can draw at least one conclusion: there is no evidence of any strain of Calvinist, Reformed, or Evangelical sentiment in Johnston's background.

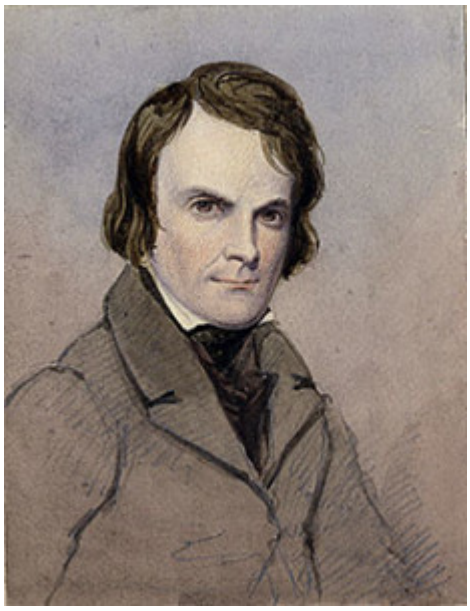
Human love, not a wrenching religious conversion or spiritual journey, determined Johnston's trajectory. In this, he followed the path of his parents. Smitten by her appearances on the Philadelphia stage, William Johnston had pursued the eighteen-year-old Charlotte Rowson to Boston when her family had moved there to open the city's first theater in 1797. He proposed, married her in Boston, and brought her back to his native city. Charlotte retired from the stage, but William maintained some involvement in theatrical business affairs in Philadelphia, eventually becoming treasurer of the Chestnut Street Theater. David, their oldest son, himself took a turn on the professional stage; as a young engraver looking for additional income, he spent three seasons as a part-time actor in Philadelphia and Baltimore.

In 1825, David Johnston moved to Boston, looking for a better reception from the city's publishers than he had received in his turbulent early years in his home city. Shortly after his arrival, Johnston became a boarder at the Irishman Thomas Murphy's well-known establishment on Federal Street—a seemingly small step that would prove momentous. The house was convenient to the Federal Street Theatre, where Johnston had "engaged with the Boston managers" for a year to finance his transition between the publishing worlds of Philadelphia and Boston. At that time, he met Murphy's daughters, Mary Priscilla, then 17, and Sara Elizabeth, then 15. He seems to have been accepted quickly as a member of the household, to judge by a birthday acrostic he composed for Mary Priscilla in 1826. His theatrical background, which would have rendered him somewhat marginal in the eyes of most residents of respectable Boston households, and disqualified him from social contact with their young women, did not seem to

have mattered.

Thomas Murphy had joined the campaign of the United Irishmen in County Wexford in the 1790s, and came to Massachusetts around 1798 after the crushing of the rebellion. Adapting well to his new country, despite the seemingly unpropitious religious climate of Massachusetts, he had become a prosperous innkeeper and then a boarding house proprietor in Concord, Woburn, and finally in Boston. He was a true pillar of both his community and his church: president of the Charitable Irish Society, founder and officer of the Vincent De Paul Society, the Roman Catholic Charitable Relief Society, and the Irish Orphans Annual Fair. His boarding house was a block or two from the Federal Street Theatre; far more important, it was next door to the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, “the first house below the Catholic Church” as his advertisements always said. Priests were always traveling between the Bishop’s seat and their scattered flocks in the far-flung Boston diocese, which until 1843 covered all six New England states. Visiting priests were surely often part of Murphy’s extended household. Both proximity and devotion made Thomas Murphy an important layman.

By the end of the theatrical season of 1825, Johnston was able “to cut the boards,” as he put it, to go back to “cutting copper.” His plan to use the theater as a bridge to full-time engraving had succeeded. He “became known to the book publishers,” and opened a shop at 81 Washington Street, where his “abilities were more than appreciated” and “liberally rewarded.” Despite his growing success, Johnston did not leave the boarding house. In fact, he would never leave the Murphy household. Smitten by a beautiful young woman, as his father had been, David patiently courted Sarah Elizabeth, and married her in 1829, just after her nineteenth birthday; he was thirty-one.



1. “David Claypoole Johnston,” self-portrait. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

2. “Portrait of John Cheverus,” drawn and engraved by D.C. Johnston from a portrait by Stuart, Boston Monthly Magazine (June 1825). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

3. Cover page of Scraps, by David Claypoole Johnston (Boston, 1829). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

Thomas Murphy had himself diverged from the customary Irish pattern by marrying Priscilla Bowers, who had made her own wrenching transition from her Congregational upbringing in Billerica to take a Catholic husband. The ceremony was performed in 1806, apparently without any of her family present, by the Rev. Francis Matignon, one of Boston’s pioneer priests. The circumstances of his own marriage may well have made Thomas more sympathetic to his daughter’s choice. It seems likely, although not yet certain, that Priscilla converted, but it is clear that she and Thomas raised their two daughters—half Irish, half Yankee—as Catholics. Mary Priscilla would become a nun, joining Mother Elizabeth Seton’s new American order, the Sisters of Charity, in 1834. It would have been clear from the beginning that David could marry Sarah only under the

auspices of the Catholic Church.

As befitted Thomas's prominence in the Catholic community—and perhaps David's own stature as an increasingly well-known engraver and artist—the couple were married by Bishop Benedict Fenwick. David did not convert, but made the promises required by canon law that he would raise their children as Catholics. Since the couple could not have taken communion together, they would have been married in a somewhat shorter ceremony outside the cathedral's altar rail. Clearly he had no religious objections to this match and its accompanying promises. Although the barriers between Protestant and Catholic were high enough everywhere in the early Republic, the leap from the Episcopal Church, with its bishops, vestments, eucharist, and Book of Common Prayer, was less precipitous than from any denomination in the reformed tradition. Thomas Murphy, the upstanding and successful Catholic layman, must have been satisfied.

David and Sarah would live in Thomas and Priscilla Murphy's house until Thomas's death in 1846, and then would inherit it, staying there until they moved to the growing suburb of Roxbury in 1854. For thirty years, Johnston would walk to his engraving shop and artist's studio from a house in the shadow of Boston's cathedral.

By making this marriage, taking a step that few American Protestants would have imagined, Johnston entered into a very different world. Although not himself yet a Catholic—he would not convert until 1844—he had attached himself to a deeply marginalized community, particularly in Boston, where suspicion, distrust, fear, and sometimes outright hatred of "the Romish church," "the Whore of Babylon," and the Pope as "the Man of Sin" were coterminous with the city's history. Most of Boston's citizens regarded the Catholic Church as a danger to American political and civil rights as well as to American souls, and the Irish as the Pope's unkempt foot soldiers.

It is interesting to note that Johnston's earliest commission after he had arrived in Boston was for a portrait engraving of Jean Cheverus, the city's first Catholic bishop, that accompanied a laudatory memoir of his life in the *Boston Magazine* of December 1825 (fig. 2). Disliked on principle by the city's evangelicals, Cheverus had been loved by his flock and widely admired by more liberal-leaning Boston Protestants-Unitarians, Episcopalians, and a few Trinitarian Congregationalists. Johnston had his own family connections with the magazine's editors, since his late aunt Susanna Rowson—the well-known writer, principal of a Boston academy for young ladies, and former actress—had been a frequent contributor to its pages. This commission began Johnston's long working relationship with the Boston writers, editors, publishers, and printers who embraced more or less liberal, or at least non-Evangelical, views of religion and society. But it was also a project of which the Murphy family would have thoroughly approved.

4. “Militia Muster, second ed., revised and improved,” David Claypoole Johnston, engraving (Philadelphia, 1819-22).Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

5. David Claypoole Johnston, “The Gone Horse,” Scraps No. 1, p. 3 (Boston, 1829). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

Still, most of Johnston’s work as an engraver and lithographer proceeded as if his connection to an immigrant people and a widely feared and distrusted religion did not exist. He found his employers and collaborators in the entirely Protestant world of Boston’s book and publishing trades, and his readers in the almost entirely Protestant book-buying publics of American cities. Poor as they generally were, Boston’s Irish would have represented no significant market for his work. He illustrated books and comic almanacs with copperplate engravings, made drawings for wood engravers, and pioneered in drawing on stone for the new art of lithography, as well as pursuing the more routine work of trade cards and business advertisements. He undertook commissions for political cartoons from the leaders of the Massachusetts National Republicans and then the Whigs. He never drew for the opposition Democrats, and it is clear that his political convictions were solidly Whiggish—very different from those of the strongly Democratic-trending Irish.

In the same year that he married Sarah, Johnston would emerge on the national

scene with his first volume of *Scraps*, a yearly publication containing 36 to 40 copperplate engravings in each issue (fig. 3). *Scraps* was an *omnium gatherum* of the comedy of American life; between 1829 and 1840 each issue presented visual puns and satirical domestic and street scenes, and over the years included extended visual essays on topics such as phrenology, English travelers' accounts, temperance, public executions, imprisonment for debt, and women's rights. Although it clearly drew inspiration from similarly named works by the great English engraver George Cruikshank, *Scraps* was like no other American publication: an extensive set of images by a single hand, a long look through a single artist's eyes. *Scraps* was a sustained visual performance, overwhelming the reader with images. It sold on the order of 3,000 or more copies a year, and was distributed by booksellers from Portland, Maine, to Charleston, South Carolina. Johnston swiftly became the first truly famous American graphic artist, whose work was recognized up and down the cities of the East. He was "the famous caricature designer," "the Cruikshank of America," a comic genius with the pencil and engraver's stylus. *Scraps*dominated the visual humor of the 1830s with a run of nine yearly issues, before falling victim to the collapse of publishing in the depression that ensued after the Panic of 1837 (the last issue of *Scraps*, first series, was published in 1840. One issue of a new series was published in 1849).

But what does *Scraps* tell us about the Irish? It would be no understatement to say that Johnston's approach to the depiction of his adopted people and soon to be co-religionists was ambivalent: sometimes more or less gently humorous, sometimes savage, and sometimes protective. Johnston did not treat the Irish gently. Of course, he did not treat most of his pictorial subjects gently. He was a satirist, not a sentimentalist. He caricatured African Americans, overdressed dandies, drunken militiamen, portrait sitters, English travelers, and would-be art critics. Johnston clearly placed himself in the lineage of English visual satire, and the Irish had always been fair game for the English satirist's pen. Interestingly, Johnston did not single out the Irish in his earliest work, a series of portrayals of Philadelphia street life produced from 1818 to 1823, in which he caricatured Pennsylvania Germans and African Americans instead (fig. 4).

6. David Claypoole Johnston, “A Party of Pleasure,” Scraps No. 3 (Boston, 1831). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

7. David Claypoole Johnston, “A Parson Fleecing His Flock,” Scraps No. 1, p. 4, (Boston, 1829). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

8. David Claypoole Johnston, “Faith and Works,” Scraps No. 3, p. 4 (Boston, 1832). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

Johnston's first depiction of an Irishman appeared in 1829 in the very first issue of *Scraps* (fig. 5). The Irishman is one of a group of plebeian bystanders pondering the fate of a "gone horse"—a verbal trope that could signify a dead animal, a political defeat, or a business failure—with a rough-hewn veterinary doctor. The Irishman, with his recognizable brogue and pattern of speech, is clearly portrayed as a ragged workingman, but is not singled out as particularly foolish or intemperate.

But in *Scraps* No. 3, published in 1831, Johnston portrays an Irish family—those whom we might think of as his relations by marriage—with full Hogarthian savagery (fig. 6). "A Party of Pleasure" is set in an underground tenement on Broad Street in Boston, the wide thoroughfare that wound southward from Washington Street to the dockyards, where hundreds of poor Irish families eked out an existence in the 1830s. The faces and figures are grim, ragged and starved-looking, bearing the marks of poverty, oppression, and sickness. But this evokes little sympathy; even the babe in arms is scrawny and its features too are caricatured as coarsely "Irish." This Irish family is making up a "party of pleasure," not to enjoy a play or a concert, but to attend a public execution. No food is visible, but there is a large whiskey barrel in the center of the single room. The man of the family carries a liquor bottle in his waistcoat pocket as well. A young pig is visible on one side of the barrel, a familiar symbol of Irish domestic hygiene; on the other can be seen a man on his sickbed. In the background, two boys are fighting. Haggard and barefoot, "Mrs. O'Leary" accepts the invitation to the hanging; her husband probably won't die until tomorrow, and she hasn't "been a pleasuring a long time." The man to be hanged is a fellow countryman, and they want to get close enough "to hear the rope twang and the neck snap." This is as furious an attack on the manners and mores of the Irish as the most strident nativist could wish. How could such people be welcome in Boston? How could they be integrated into the social fabric and given political rights? And how could the handsome, charming, and talented David Claypoole Johnston marry into their community?

10. David Claypoole Johnston, “Height of Cleanliness,” Scraps No. 6, p. 2 (Boston, 1835). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.


11. David Claypoole Johnston, “An Election Day Scene Aboard Ship in the Harbor of N. York,” Scraps No. 6, p. 4 (Boston, 1835). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

This is truly a puzzle. Johnston’s business addresses—where he drew, engraved, ran proofs on his copperplate press, sold some pictures and illustrated books and kept his own prints for sale—changed every few years, but he stayed in the compact area that encompassed Boston’s book and printing trades. But for twenty-five years he, Sarah, and their growing family lived with the Murphys; their household was attached to the boarding house that Sarah’s parents ran. Johnston lived in the shadow of the cathedral and in the presence of his father-in-law, in a house where visiting priests would be put up, and where the Charitable Irish Society and Vincent DePaul Society would meet. Johnston’s personal life was deeply enmeshed with his Irish-American family and the Catholic Church.

“A Party of Pleasure” caricatures the Broad Street Irish for their physical coarseness, their drinking, their domestic slovenliness, and their embrace of violence. These are all enduring themes in Johnston’s satirical work, the bulk of which did not refer specifically to the Irish, but included all Americans in its satiric embrace. Johnston never missed an opportunity to portray a gap-

toothed face, a drink-reddened nose, fouled clothing, a man spoiling for a fight, a group of men behaving badly in public. He created images of households in dishevelment and discord, juxtaposed with happy families—images of his and Sarah's domestic life. He opposed capital punishment, and campaigned visually for temperance until the end of his life.

Johnston—whose art was dismissed in the late nineteenth century as too crude for cultivated tastes—enlisted early in the campaign against coarseness in American life. He was a preacher, in his visual way, of the gospel of gentility. Johnston allied himself with New England critics like Timothy Dwight, Robert B. Thomas, and Josiah Quincy in attacking American slovenliness and coarseness. Where they criticized dirty houses, disorderly domestic landscapes, and slovenly farming, he looked at American faces, bodies, and public deportment. He created mocking images of domestic disorder and personal dishevelment, of men getting drunk in taverns, of tobacco chewers and the foolishly belligerent. For the most part it was an assault on a particular version of American masculinity, a critique of what Richard Stott has called the culture of the "jolly fellows"—American male milieus, in city and countryside, soaked in fighting and drinking.

In one sense, this Broad Street Irish family, with its unfortunate cultural traits—however much they could be chalked up to generations of poverty and oppression—was simply another example of the disorder of American life that Johnston both embraced and condemned. But the image is a savage assault all the same, expressing no love for his wife's countrymen. We are left to wonder what Sarah or her parents thought of it. Yet at the same time, from his first issue of *Scraps* on, Johnston could also be found attacking their enemies; he relentlessly caricatured the evangelical Protestants who were the most vocal and virulent opponents of Catholicism and decriers of the Irish (figs. 7, 8). Johnston seems to have assumed that evangelicals were not part of his audience, and never would be.

How did Johnston, so tightly attached to the Murphy family and linked to a highly visible pillar of the Irish community, square his art and his attachments? Part of the answer is simply this: the Murphys were not Broad Street Irish. In many ways they were highly acculturated. Thomas Murphy had been active in political life in Ireland, and came to the United States with at least some capital. He had lived in Massachusetts since the 1790s, and had the social skills to succeed as a tavern and boarding house keeper. Mary and Sarah were not colleens from the "Ould Sod," but American-born girls whose mother was a New Englander, and had received genteel educations. Sarah was herself an artist; a number of her watercolor landscapes and floral studies are preserved in the Johnston Family collections. She would not have spoken with a brogue—and, by all accounts, she was beautiful. Love and gentility trumped ethnicity.

Immersed at home in the Murphy family's concerns, Johnston seems to have been drawn gradually to Catholic belief as well. The priest to whom the Johnstons

and Murphys became closest was the Rev. John Bernard Fitzpatrick, the American-born son of an Irish merchant tailor who had attended Boston Latin School before going to Montreal and Paris for his seminary studies. He maintained close friendships over the years with several of his former schoolmates—men who would go on to become members of Boston's Unitarian elite. Learned, witty, and interested in art and science, Fitzpatrick himself frequently sighed over the drinking, fighting, and coarseness of manners of the impoverished immigrants who increasingly made up his flock. Like Johnston, he was a Whig in politics, going against the main current of Irish political allegiance. Befriended by a priest who shared many of his views, Johnston would eventually go on to take religious instruction from him.

12. David Claypoole Johnston, Scraps No. 6, p. 3 (Boston, 1835). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

13. David Claypoole Johnston, "Catholic Doings," Scraps, No. 6, p. 3 (Boston,

1835). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

14. David Claypoole Johnston, “The Fanatic’s Dream,” Scraps, No. 6, p. 3 (Boston, 1835). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

Scraps No. 6, published in January 1835, most clearly shows Johnston playing his dual roles, complicated if not contradictory, as social and political critic and religious defender. It came out some five months after an event that profoundly shook Boston’s Catholic and Irish community: the burning of the Ursuline Convent and school in Charlestown on August 11, 1834.

But this publication presents us with a complex set of images and attitudes. The first page includes a satirical drawing aimed at Sabbatarian evangelicals, claiming that they would not even allow physicians’ visits on Sunday (fig. 9). Prominent on the second page is one of Johnston’s frequent domestic satires, an engraving titled “Height of Cleanliness” (fig. 10). He portrays the lady of the household as a parvenu foolishly aspiring to gentility by seeking hyper-cleanliness; her Irish maid is a slab-faced slattern, carrying out her employer’s instructions to scrub down the half-burnt backlog and clean out the ash pit “so the ashes don’t get soiled.” Although it must be said that Johnston makes fun of both mistress and maid, this is one of the first of several decades of caricatures, both graphic and photographic, of the Irish maid as part of the “servant problem” for prosperous American households. (It must also be said that by 1850 the Johnston family had its own Irish maid, a young woman named Mary Barnicle.)

And occupying a central position on page 4 of *Scraps* No. 6 is “An Election Day Scene,” another salvo aimed at the Irish (fig. 11). This time the target is New York City’s massive Democratic machine, Tammany Hall, and its recruitment of illegal voters “right off the boat.” Johnston shows Tammany operatives instructing newly arrived men, some of whom seem to be former convicts. “Now we understand,” says one Tammany man. “You are to go with me and vote, but in the first place you must swear that you have been in this country for five years.”

The new voter replies “Don’t bother yourself about the swearing, I’ll swear that I’ve been here ten years.” Some of the men may be English, but the majority, based on their clothes, faces, shillelaghs, and speech, are clearly Irishmen. And then Johnston has one of the Tammany figures angrily contrast New York to Boston, “where the blackguards won’t allow an honest fellow like you or I to give in what they calls an illegal vote.” This was an image to warm the partisan hearts of Johnston’s political and publishing friends as they worked to build the Whig party in opposition to Andrew Jackson’s populist Democratic juggernaut; Johnston was already caricaturing Jackson in a series of political cartoons. But it unquestionably portrayed at least some Irishmen as ruffians whose participation in politics was wholly illegitimate.

Yet these images of the Irish maid and the Irish rogue voters bracket page 3 of *Scraps*, which was a furious attack on the convent rioters and a blazing defense of Catholic—which would have been read as meaning almost entirely Irish—rights to religious freedom, social equality, and political participation. Johnston devoted ten engravings to the burning of the convent, one-fourth of the issue’s contents. One gets the impression that he was working with great speed and considerable anger.

Thanks to Daniel Cohen’s scholarship, we now know how complex was the sequence of events leading up to the burning of the Ursuline Convent, traceable in great part to intricate neighborhood feuds, dysfunctions within both local Yankee families and the convent’s extended household, and the heedlessly aggressive personalities of the Ursulines’ Mother Superior and a number of the riot’s ringleaders.

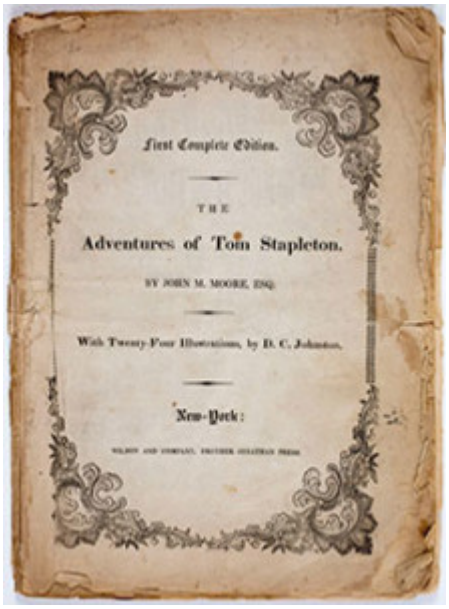
But such a refined analysis, satisfying as it is to us, would have meant nothing to the city’s Irish at the time. They were dealing with the matrix in which the riots took place—a climate of seemingly implacable hostility to both their persons and their faith. What they saw was an existential threat to their place in the community. Their leaders counseled peace and patience, and joined their voices with almost all of official and respectable Boston in condemnation of the rioters. But despite his sharp (not to say unkind) observations of Irish manners and politics, Johnston did, in his own distinctive way, give visual expression to their outrage.

The first image shows the scales of justice being tipped by a heavy weight of lies and calumny. One of the books shown tipping the scales—”Miller’s Lies”—is clearly identifiable. It is Samuel Miller’s *A history of popery, including its origin, progress, doctrines, practice, institutions, and fruits, to the commencement of the nineteenth century*, which had appeared in Boston’s bookstores in 1834, just in time to help fan the flames (fig. 12).

The second image would have been clear to every reader: it shows the Reverend Lyman Beecher (alias “Dr. Brimstone”) thundering against the convent rioters from the pulpit while secretly fanning the flames; Beecher, the most powerful preacher of his day, had delivered three anti-Catholic sermons on August 10,

the night before the convent burned.

Next comes a familiar trope from the traditions of American political cartooning—the Constitution in tatters, Liberty cast down with her mouth locked, the free press chained, bodies hanging from the gallows. In a final ironic touch, the cartoon depicts an *auto da fe* in process.



15. Title page of The Adventures of Tom Stapleton … with 24 Illustrations by D.C. Johnston, John M. Moore. Wilson and Co., Brother Jonathan Press (New York, 1843). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

After depicting an Evangelical fanatic literally breathing in a Devil's brew of hatred, Johnston moves on to picture the mob; borrowing heavily from his already famous militia caricatures, he portrays them as a disorderly rabble, egged on by their leader who spouts poisonous nonsense about religious freedom meaning the freedom to punish others for their beliefs.

16. David Claypoole Johnston, "Parson Fleeceflock," Scraps No. 1, New Series, p. 3 (Boston, 1849). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Johnston then contrasts Charlestown's two monuments—the obelisk celebrating the heroes of the Battle of Bunker Hill, and the ruins of the convent,

commemorating the heroes of intolerance. In the center of the image is a dialogue between a mob sympathizer and a well-dressed man resembling Johnston himself in his self-portraits. When the nativist claims that “there never was a good American Catholic,” the figure representing Johnston responds “Indeed! And what was Charles Carroll?” His interlocutor does not recognize the name of the Maryland Catholic who signed the Declaration of Independence. Secure in his ignorance, the nativist says “Never heard of him.”

17. David Claypoole Johnston, “On the Anxious Seat,” Scraps No. 1, New Series, p. 4 (Boston, 1849). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

The men’s sons are shown playing marbles; when one boy asks why the convent was destroyed, the nativist’s son answers that it was the fault of “the papists that burnt John Rogers,” the Puritan martyr burned at the stake in 1555 during the reign of Queen Mary. It’s the story “what was in the Primer,” the boy goes on to say—a reference to the ubiquitous *New England Primer* that had been carrying the story, with its anti-Catholic charge and its woodcut of the Papists giving Rogers to the flames, into New England homes since the 1690s. This vignette also points up Johnston’s engagement with the visual tradition of New England, as his reference is clearly to the illustration in the *Primer* rather than to the full version of the story.

The adjacent picture, “Catholic Doings,” is Johnston’s most personal statement (fig. 13); it contrasts the viciousness of the rioters with the selfless work of the Sisters of Charity—the first American order of nuns-in caring for the victims of the cholera epidemic in Philadelphia in 1832. Johnston knew this at first-hand. His parents and three of his sisters lived in the city, he retained extensive connections with publishers there, and his sister-in-law, Mary Priscilla Murphy, had joined the Sisters of Charity in 1834.

In the most elaborate image on the page, “The Fanatic’s Dream,” Johnston executes a remarkable inversion of the standard Protestant attack on the Inquisition, a mainstay of anti-Catholic controversy (fig. 14). Here the fanatical evangelical believers are peopling the dungeons with heretics and regulating thought and behavior. He depicts a United States overrun by a Protestant inquisition, with penalties for any deviation from evangelical orthodoxy: a child is whipped for reading nursery rhymes rather than the story of John Rogers; cider is arrested for “working” on the Sabbath; men are imprisoned, starved and tortured for disbelieving the “true faith,” reading forbidden (i.e., Catholic) books, or for simply being related to infidels. The Inquisition, long used as the supreme example of Catholic cruelty and intolerance, was a particularly tricky subject to bring up, since the Church,

while regretting some of its excesses, had never formally renounced it. American Catholics preferred not to discuss it. Johnston, very close to the Catholic community in Boston but not yet one of them, may have felt freer to pursue it, putting himself and his adopted people on the side of freedom and tolerance.

Johnston thus defended his adopted community without naming them, and used his gifts to attack their attackers. His response took no theological position, and had nothing to do with the language of triumphal Catholic ecclesiology sometimes used by the Church's official advocates. He based his defense on common decency, the Constitution's guarantees of religious freedom and freedom of speech, the rule of law, Catholic good works as exemplified in his own family, and the brutality, ignorance and bigotry of the mob. The ferocity of the caricatures tells us about Johnston's personal stake in the crisis, but the content of the argument could have come from a well-educated Unitarian gentleman of tolerance and good will.

18. David Claypoole Johnston, "A Horrid Young Monster," Scraps No. 1, New Series, p. 4 (Boston, 1849). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

For fifteen years after the Charlestown riot, Johnston's work avoided issues of religious or ethnic controversy. Johnston would only once more put the Irish in his satirical sights, and that would be in the course of their defense. He concentrated on book, newspaper, and magazine illustration, exhibited and sold his watercolors, still took commissions for political cartoons, and fashioned a second career for himself as one of the city's "best teachers of art and drawing." In 1841, Johnston started to work on Irish themes in a different way, after he was introduced to the Irish American writer and editor John McDermott Moore of New York City. McDermott was a witty and cultivated man, who shared some of Johnston's connections among New York editors and publishers. Johnston provided illustrations for one Moore short story, "The Three Avengers," about the 1798 Rebellion, and then for a light-hearted dramatic fantasy, "Patrick O'Flynn, or the Man in the Moon." In 1843 Johnston and Moore then collaborated on *The Adventures of Tom Stapleton*, a short novel about politics, class, romance, and boarding house life in New York City that sympathetically portrayed the Irish as part of the city's ethnic tapestry. Seeking to tell this story, both picaresque and sentimental, in images, Johnston created 24 illustrations for a work of 80 pages (fig. 15). The density of Johnston's work made it almost, if not quite, a graphic novel. All of Moore's and Johnston's work was produced by mainstream city publishers, and not specifically intended for an Irish readership.

19. David Claypoole Johnston, “A Case of Conscience,” Scraps No. 1, New Series, p. 4 (Boston, 1849). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

In 1844 he took the final step into the embrace of his adopted family, taking instructions from family friend Rev. John Bernard Fitzpatrick, by then the Coadjutor Bishop, and being received into the church in a joint ceremony with the notably unpredictable writer and social critic Orestes Brownson. Fitzpatrick’s sister wrote to Sarah Elizabeth, “I cannot refrain from attempting to express the joy, the delight, I felt in the reception of the late happy intelligence—the conversion of your dear and excellent husband to the One fold of our holy religion.” She went on to write, “What a consolation it must be to your good father. He has now witnessed the consummation of his wishes, and can leave the world in peace.” The *United States Catholic Magazine and Monthly Review* recorded this milestone for the Church, noting that “Orestes Brownson, Esq.” and “D.C. Johnston Esq. (‘the Cruikshank of America’)” had been received “into the fold of the One Shepherd.” They announced with some optimism that “such scenes as this are becoming of frequent occurrence in our churches.”

20. David Claypoole Johnston, “A Stunner.” Courtesy of the David Claypoole Johnston Family Collection (Box 4, Folder 1.1), American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

In the next year would come the famine in Ireland, followed by the towering waves of Irish immigration to Boston that would reshape the city's demographic, social, and economic landscape and put enormous strains on the Church and the Irish community's lay leadership. The now "venerable" Thomas Murphy presided with the bishop over efforts to accommodate the new immigrants and to relieve Irish suffering with American Irish funds. Johnston created no images of the Famine or of the distressed new arrivals. It presumably seemed like no time or place for caricature. In 1848, he began a second collaboration with an Irish American writer. This time the author was a priest, the Rev. John Boyce, who was serving St. John's parish in Worcester. Learned and cultivated, Boyce had been encouraged to publish by Bishop Fitzpatrick, who put him in touch with Johnston, his long-time family friend. Johnston provided the illustrations for Boyce's novel of Irish life in the turbulent Ulster of the 1820s, *Shandy Maguire*. This seems to have been the only time that Johnston addressed life in Ireland in his art.

But in 1849, Johnston resuscitated *Scraps* after nine years, and published a final issue. In the year after the Seneca Falls Convention, he poked fun at the emerging movement for women's rights, and provided a Northeastern Whig critique of the Mexican War, for which he was praised in advance by the Boston *Catholic Observer,* whose editors had staunchly opposed the invasion of a Catholic country. Yet something else is also striking about this issue—the intensity of Johnston's hostility in a four-engraving sequence on evangelical ministers, congregations, and laymen (figs. 16-19). He shows them as men possessed by hypocrisy, greed and fanaticism. Since 1845, feeling against the Irish and the Catholic Church had mounted with every new shipload of struggling immigrants; Johnston was, perhaps, preemptively attacking the attackers again. The new *Scraps* No. 1 had a reasonably successful run, but Johnston was unable to continue the annual into the 1850s. The publishing world had changed too much.

Still, Johnston continued to use his satirical pen to attack intemperance and ruffian-like behavior in public. In the 1850s he produced a remarkable series of engravings and related watercolors: "A Stunner" (fig. 20), "Sleeper and Marker" (fig. 21), and "A Grave Mistake" (fig. 22). But these men are of indeterminate ethnicity; they could be native Bostonians, Irish immigrants, new arrivals from the New England countryside, or British Americans from Maritime Canada. What they have in common is drunkenness, and the loss of dignity that Johnston had consistently linked to intemperance.

21. David Claypoole Johnston, “Sleeper and Marker” (1855). Courtesy of the David Claypoole Johnston Family Collection (Box 3, Folder 18), American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Johnston also addressed the tumultuous events of national politics in those years. In 1845 he ceased creating the abusive anti-black caricatures that had been a staple of his work from 1819 on—a shift in his artistic work that has yet to be fully explained. His subsequent depictions of African Americans would be far more humanized; he even sketched “Eliza crossing the Ice” in 1852 (fig. 23). He turned against Webster and the conservative remnant of the Whigs over the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Fugitive Slave Act, supported Fremont and Free Soil in 1856, and backed Lincoln in 1860. In this he moved ever farther away from the political and racial stance of Boston’s Irish Catholics, and broke politically, although not personally, with his friend Bishop Fitzpatrick, who supported Webster and the Dred Scott decision authored by the Catholic Chief Justice Taney. He became that political oddity, at least for New England: a Roman Catholic Republican.

22. David Claypoole Johnston, “A Grave Mistake” (1832?) Courtesy of the David

Claypoole Johnston Family Collection (Box 3, Folder 14), American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

23. David Claypoole Johnston, “Eliza Crossing the Ice,” pencil sketch. Courtesy of the David Claypoole Johnston Family Collection (Box 8, Folder 46), American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Yet in the midst of these turbulent developments on the national scene came a political cataclysm in Massachusetts that would return Johnston to combat on behalf of his faith and fellow believers. In 1853 and 1854, with the state’s party system in tatters, the proposed revised state constitution rejected, nativist sentiment rising, and the electorate deeply discontented, the American Party, or “Know-Nothings,” began a secretive organizing campaign. The Know-Nothings’ disciplined silence and the voters’ readiness to try something new gave them an enormous electoral victory, with huge majorities in the Massachusetts House and Senate, as well as the governorship. The Whigs, the Democrats, and the Free Soil men were shattered and dismayed.

With this election, the Irish in Massachusetts—now many times more numerous and more visible than they had been at the time of the Charlestown riots twenty years earlier—faced a true existential crisis, an attempt to destroy their precarious foothold in the Commonwealth. The American Party was a coalition of many interests, some of them focused on women’s rights, banking reform, increased education spending, and labor reform. But the most widely trumpeted plank in the Know-Nothing platform was a drastic and thoroughgoing attack on the Irish and their faith that sought to destroy the political rights of immigrants by changing the naturalization laws, and sought to attack their culture by sharply limiting and monitoring the activities of the Catholic Church. This time, it would be a scandal at the heart of state government instead of a riot that would give Johnston a target at which to direct his skills.

Just as in 1834, it was the convent that again became a focus of almost hysterical concern—that Catholic institution that so radically preoccupied the nativist and evangelical mind with images of girls at risk and women in charge, and the rules of household governance perverted to sinister Romish ends. The

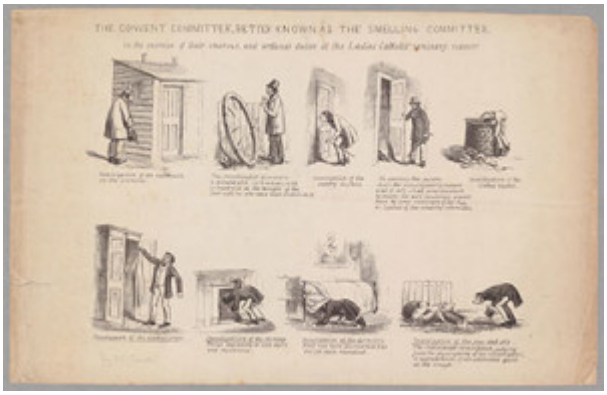
Massachusetts House of Representatives, largely composed of new and inexperienced members eager to enact their nativist program, swiftly moved to constitute a committee to investigate “seminaries of learning under the control of the Roman Catholic Church.” This soon became known as the Nunnery Committee, an appellation more reflective of its actual purpose. The Ursuline Convent riot had been a terrible event, but one without official sanction; the Nunnery Committee seemed to have the power of the state behind it, a kind of Nativist Inquisition.

Fortunately for the Irish, for the cause of religious tolerance, and for Johnston, the activities of the Committee soon fell from Inquisitorial high drama to low farce. On March 26, 1855, a sizable group of committee members and hangers-on appeared at the Academy of the Sisters of Notre Dame, a Catholic boarding school for girls in Roxbury, and announced their intention to make an immediate and complete examination of the premises. They were admitted by the Superior, Sister Mary Aloysius, who was given the impression that “they came armed with power and right to enter.” Committee members proceeded to open every door and walk through every room of the building from cellar to attic, look into closets and cupboards, intrude on worshippers in the chapel, go into a sickroom where one of the pupils lay ill, and virtually force a couple of the sisters into conversation about their faith and status. After their half-hour inspection had revealed nothing except frightened girls, and teachers struggling painfully to conceal their own apprehension, the committee adjourned to the Norfolk House for a celebratory meal at the Commonwealth’s expense, including champagne—thus violating the temperance statutes that the House itself had recently passed.

As this story became widely known and hit the newspapers, an earlier visit of the committee to Catholic schools in Lowell came under scrutiny. This time, no major improprieties seem to have occurred during the visitations themselves. The aftermath, however, was a full-scale scandal. The Committee members had taken the train up from Boston in the morning, and decided to dine and stay overnight at the elegant Washington House before returning to the capital. Joseph Hiss, a House member from Boston and a high-ranking official of the American Party, had settled the bill and charged all of the expedition’s expenses to the state government. The Committee’s entertainment included meals with wine, post-prandial gin, and cigars—and, for Mr. Hiss, a room adjoining his own for a lady he had brought to dinner, whose name he set down as “Mrs. Patterson.” The twin scandals exploded with such force that the American Party’s own newspapers fell uncharacteristically silent and the House leadership was compelled to begin two highly unwelcome investigations, one of the Nunnery Committee’s activities, and the other of Hiss’s conduct.

Johnston’s response was immediate—and, of course, graphic. As concern mounted in the newspapers about the invasion of a private household, and the oafish (if not worse) behavior of the committee members, Johnston exposed them to withering visual ridicule in a large single-sheet lithograph of nine images, titled “The Convent Committee, better known as The Smelling Committee” (fig.

24). Committee members were pictured sniffing around the house's privy and pigsty, as well as looking under beds, upending clothes baskets, and peering through keyholes. The print went on sale in the bookstores within a week after the story broke; the Boston *Evening Transcript* noted that the shop window of Johnston's publishers on Washington Street "has been besieged all morning by a crowd of laughers at the exquisite caricature of the Smelling Committee." In a separate editorial, the *Transcript* described the print and commended it to its readers, noting that it was "a very funny picture and will undoubtedly have a large sale." Highly popular, the "Smelling Committee" print would play a significant contributing role in the political ruin of the Know-Nothings in Massachusetts.



24. David Claypoole Johnston, "The Convent Committee, better known as the Smelling Committee" (Boston, 1855). Courtesy of the Political Cartoon Collection, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

As before, Johnston had special cause for his animus against the disturbers of the peace and privacy of a convent and convent school. His sister-in-law Mary Priscilla was still a nun, a Sister of Mercy to the end of her long life. But there may well have been something else. The Johnston family had moved to Roxbury in 1854, not far from the Academy grounds. David and Sarah's two younger daughters, Charlotte Constance and Sarah Jane, may well have been students at the school.

Johnston's second attack on the committee was more indirect and allusive, and unraveling it requires some attention to the arcana of nineteenth-century American politics. The committee investigating Joseph Hiss had made an extensive, but unavailing, search for the "Mrs. Patterson" listed on the bill. Various actual Mrs. Pattersons had indignantly and convincingly denied their involvement. Hiss's companion was, clearly, a "lady of easy virtue" under an assumed name. Johnston could take some liberties as a caricaturist, but he was bound by strict rules of propriety about representing sexuality. He could not draw Hiss and his companion in bed together, or climbing the stairs to the room

that they would share.

However, “Patterson” was a name with some resonance in American politics. The story of Billy Patterson supposedly went back to political struggles in Pennsylvania in the early 1840s, when a man of that name was struck and killed by a brickbat during a political parade, and his assailant was never found. “Who struck Billy Patterson?” then became the all-purpose unanswerable question of American politics. To ask it in reply to any inquiry simply meant “No one knows.”

Hiss might or might not have named his companion “Mrs. Patterson” as a deliberate jest, but Johnston took it for one. In a single large-scale lithographic image he resurrected the long-departed (or perhaps wholly mythical) “William Patterson Esq” (fig. 25) who, looking at least half-dead, has been reading about the Convent Committee’s doings in Lowell and is now lamenting his wife’s infidelity. “How slight the blow/I years ago/Got from some unknown feller,” Johnston has him say, “Compared with this/From Joseph [Hiss]/the prying Convent smeller.”

25. David Claypoole Johnston, “William Patterson Esq.” lithograph (Boston, 1855). Courtesy of the Political Cartoon Collection, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

“William Patterson” was published and in the shop windows a week after “The Smelling Committee” appeared, and it too was seen as a crucial part of the campaign of ridicule against the Know-Nothings. The *Transcript* praised Johnston’s portrait of “this noted citizen … in deep affliction,” adding that “The Legislature should give each member a copy.” That of course did not happen, but both prints were burned into the public consciousness during that frenetic spring of 1855, which ended with Hiss expelled from the House, and the Convent Committee allowed to lapse into non-existence.

The last of Johnston’s prints in defense of his Irish Catholic adopted brethren was created that same year. It was a response not to the actions of the Great and General Court but to one of the forces behind them: the anti-Catholic lecturers who, at the same time that the Nunnery Committee was carrying on its work, were filling pulpits and lecture podiums across the state. He had his choice of targets, ranging from staid clergymen to allegedly defrocked Catholic priests, from table-thumping lay lecturers to the completely crazy “Angel Gabriel” Orr who gathered crowds outdoors with blasts from his trumpet and fomented attacks on Catholic churches. Johnston chose instead Elder John A. Perry, a man of somewhat mysterious origins whose highly visual lectures and obvious artistic skill must have both intrigued and infuriated him.

Perry first came to public notice with his book, *Thrilling Adventures of a New Englander,* in 1853, a volume illustrated by himself which contained accounts of his travels in Cuba, Mexico, and California. Part of the book was a standard account of adventures and foreign sights. The section on Mexico, however, was an exposé of the cruel practices and depraved superstitions of the Catholic Church, including underground chambers where semi-nude young women were tortured for refusing the advances of priests or seeking to leave the convents in which they had been imprisoned. Upon returning to Massachusetts, Perry set up as a lecturer, thundering against Popery and lavishly illustrating his talks with paintings and magic lantern slides of the dungeons of the Inquisition and—as always—the horrors of convent life. Perry was an artist of some talent, but in a perverse way he was also a man of the theater. In 1854 and 1855 he accompanied his lectures and illuminated paintings with onstage appearances of women dressed in the habits of various religious orders, to underline his "thrilling exposé of the papal nunneries in New England."

An artist and performer himself, Johnston seems to have been drawn to Perry as an opponent, and responded with a visually complex attack on Perry and his anti-Catholic supporters in the small industrial city of Fitchburg, where the Know-Nothings were particularly strong and a funeral procession of Irish mourners had recently been viciously attacked on its way to the graveyard.

Perry is shown attached to a gun carriage, and holding a magic lantern projector as if he is the gun barrel (fig. 26). Two women in nun's costumes—Perry's nativist models—are wheeling the gun along, and a prominent local official of the Know-Nothings is preparing to "touch off the Great Gun" as the magic lantern's rays illuminate and affright the "foes of America." Johnston's depiction of them—with their ragged clothes, tattered hats, and shillelaghs—marks them as a group of poor and frightened Irish Catholic laborers.

26. David Claypoole Johnston, "Elder Perry's Position," lithograph (Boston, 1855). Courtesy of the Political Cartoon Collection, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

The year 1855 proved the high tide of the Know-Nothing movement in Massachusetts, as the American Party, buffeted by scandal, and increasingly considered unfit to govern, fell ignominiously from power in 1856. Johnston might well have been proud of the role he had played in holding the Nunnery Committee and Joseph Hiss up to ridicule. Elder Perry gave his final lectures about the perils of Romanism in March of 1856, supposedly leaving to join the anti-slavery forces in "Bleeding Kansas." He seems to have never lectured again. In October of 1860 he was in Providence, Rhode Island, being sued for

attempting to turn his lecture illustrations into $240 in cash; his unhappy would-be partner alleged that Perry's "panorama paintings" were now "valueless." If Johnston had known this, he would surely have been amused. Although hostility to Catholicism and the Irish had hardly gone away in Massachusetts, the politics of slavery, sectional discord, and disunion crowded out nativism and nunneries. Johnston did not address this subject again.

In the crisis of 1854-56, Johnston had, as before, defended the Irish without naming them. And even as he used his art to attack their enemies (and his), his caricaturist's eye did not entirely spare them. He drew the Irish one final time—as a tattered group of new arrivals in Fitchburg, under attack by Elder Perry and his followers. In his own wholly distinctive, almost unaccountable way, all these images of attack and defense had been what he did for love.

Further Reading

Most of Johnston's papers and art works are in the collections of the American Antiquarian Society. AAS also holds by far the largest collection of Johnston's published engravings and lithographs, and holds the great majority of the books and periodicals in which his work appeared. A smaller but distinctive collection of sketches and transfer drawings is at the Houghton Library, Harvard University. There are many studies of Johnston, but no full-scale, definitive biography. See Malcolm Johnson, *David Claypoole Johnston: American Graphic Humorist, 1798- 1865* (Boston and Worcester, Mass., 1970); Georgianne McVey, "David Claypoole Johnston: America's Cruikshank," PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1971; Clarence S. Brigham, "David Claypoole Johnston, the American Cruikshank," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (April 1940): 98-110; "David Claypoole Johnston," *Dictionary of American Biography.*

All students of Johnston owe an immense debt to the scholarship of David Tatham, expressed in his indispensable checklists and many fine art historical studies over the years; see, for example, David Tatham, "D.C. Johnston's Pictorialization of Vernacular Humor in Jacksonian America," in *American Speech 1600 to the Present. The Dublin Seminar for American Folklife Annual Proceedings*, 1983, edited by Peter Benes (Boston, 1984): 107-119. Many details of Johnston's life can be found in an autobiographical newspaper sketch he wrote in 1835; see D.C. Johnston, "Autobiography,"*New-England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser* (3 January 1835).

This article originally appeared in issue 13.3 (Spring, 2013).

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life of humble people in nineteenth-century America, he held a 2011-12 NEH fellowship at the American Antiquarian Society to conduct research on David Claypoole Johnston, from which this article is drawn. He died, after a battle with pancreatic cancer, on March 29, 2013. While we are saddened that Jack passed away before this article’s appearance, we are honored to be able to publish it. He is survived by his wife, Barbara, two brothers, two sons and daughters-in-law, and five grandchildren.