

**S. J. Burr, "Gabriel Harrison and the Daguerrean Art," March 1851**

(keywords: Gabriel Harrison, Samuel Jones Burr, John Plumbe, William H. Butler, Martin M. Lawrence, 203 Broadway, John Sartain, Eliza C. Hurley, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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*Gabriel Harrison* Digitized by Google

[caption:] Gabriel Harrison / ENGRAVED EXPRESSLY FOR THE  
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## GABRIEL HARRISON AND THE DAGUERREAN ART.

BY S. J. BURR

GABRIEL HARRISON! How the heart leaps within the bosom at the mere mention of the name! And yet Gabriel Harrison is neither a soldier nor a statesman. Though but a young man unscarred by the warrior's sword, he is a hero—to all intents and purposes, an American hero. His courage has been tried in the furnace of affliction; and under circumstances which would have appalled most men, he has (when unable any longer to contend for his own schemes) compelled others triumphantly to carry out his heroic enterprise. But we will not run so far in advance of our history. Let us begin when he began his toilsome and energetic career.

Gabriel Harrison was born in Philadelphia on the 25th of March 1817. His father moved to New York in July 1822; and when only eleven years of age, the young Gabriel was placed at the press, to assist his father in printing bank notes. When thirteen, his father lived in Reade street, and an event which occurred at this time roused his young mind to the importance of acquiring knowledge; for previously his education had been entirely neglected.

A few doors above the house occupied by his father, there lived a small, silver headed old gentleman, who sat much at the front window with his head resting upon his hand, and his eyes most generally cast inward upon the room.

The old gentleman attracted the attention of the kind-hearted, though untutored boy, and his young eyes often discovered tears trickling down the pale and wrinkled cheek. Gabriel longed to know the cause of this silent grief, and yet shrunk from making any approach that would enable him to satisfy his mind. On one occasion however, he was so much overcome by this daily occurrence, that climbing up the cellar door, he gently touched the old man's shoulder, and, with a voice of childish sympathy, asked him, "what is the matter? Can I do anything for you?" The grief-stricken man suddenly started—appeared somewhat confused—hastily wiped the glistening drops from his pallid cheek, and replied, "No," but the next moment invited the boy to come into his house.

As he entered the parlor, the first question that met his ear was "do you know how to read?" and as the inquiry was put, a volume of the History of the United States was placed in his hand, from which the boy of thirteen received from his aged friend, *his first lesson in reading*. The character of teacher and pupil was at once established, and Gabriel went every afternoon to rehearse to his new and, as yet, unknown master.

This intimacy was continued for over three months, during which time the old gentleman was rapidly developing the yearning and comprehensive intellect of the boy. He not only gave him his regular reading lessons, but inculcated the purest moral principles, striving to fix his youthful ardor upon a foundation which should be productive of the most good in after life.

He was told that "next to his mother he must love his country best—that he must always be careful to keep the wings of his ambition well clipped—that too much ambition was the bane of many worthy and excellent men. Ambition sometime cut off men in the glory of their manhood's pride; while with others it produced bitter and dreamy thoughts in after life." So delighted was young Gabriel with his kind and instructive friend, that he made rapid progress under his tuition; though he had not yet learned his name. An accident however, soon discovered the standing and character of his benefactor, and at the same time parted them forever. In opening the book one day to read as usual, Gabriel happened to commence a poem headed "Hamilton and Burr." As he

pronounced their names, the old gentleman turned quickly toward him—placed his thin hand over the page, saying, “Stop, my boy, not that. Look for something else.” The intimation thus given produced a flash of intelligence upon the mind of the lad, who thoughtlessly and eagerly inquired. “Are you the man who shot Hamilton?” “I am that wretched man,” replied Colonel Burr, for his aged and grief worn friend was none other than that distinguished and unfortunate man. The Colonel covered his face with his hands, burst into tears and walked the room rapidly for some moments, when he told Gabriel to go home. He never entered the house of Colonel Burr from that day, though he continually declares that the Colonel was the best friend of his boyhood.

The insight which the boy had obtained of his own soul continued to expand. The fire of mind had been lighted by his unhappy friend, and he determined to procure an education at all hazards. He continued privately his reading lessons, and endeavored to imitate the touching and precise elocution of his teacher.

Shortly after this the young student witnessed a theatrical exhibition for the first time. Of course he was greatly delighted and at once longed to be a stage hero. With this intent he joined a dramatic association, of which he became a very conspicuous member before he was 15 years of age.

In 1838, when about twenty years old, he was induced by a prominent officer of the Texan army to make his first public appearance. This he did in November of that year, at the National Theatre, then under the management of Mr. Wallack. Here he performed the character of Othello, to a splendid house, and was called out to be bravely cheered at the end of the performance. The papers of the day following pronounced the *debut* the best ever witnessed in New York. This announcement attracted the attention of Mrs. George Jones, who immediately called upon the youthful debutant, and induced him to accept an engagement for the Avon theatre, then being built by her husband at Norfolk, Virginia. Under this encouragement, he went to Norfolk; but a few days after his arrival, the new theatre was sold for a church, when he returned heartily disappointed, but with his mind made up never to become an actor.

Mr. Harrison’s father was a great connoisseur of pictures—delighting in the possession of works by the best painters. Gabriel’s home was therefore well stocked with studies, some of which were indeed worthy of being numbered with the productions of the most accomplished artists. Old Mr. Harrison was a gentleman of great enthusiasm and kept the specimens in his gallery as charming and delightful pets—regaling himself for hours in pondering upon their accuracy and admiring their beauties.

On his return from Norfolk, Gabriel’s mind seems to have suddenly taken a new turn, or perhaps it would be more proper to say, that the early associations of his boyhood now began to burst forth. Painting attracted his attention, and he made his first attempt at oil-painting; and although possessed of an indifferent supply of materials, he produced a very excellent moonlight scene. Mr. Peter Grain, one of the best scene painters, induced the young artist to take his picture to the National Academy, which was then soon to open for exhibition. Here it was received and well spoken of by the celebrated Colonel Trumbull. Gabriel was strongly encouraged by the Colonel to persevere in his new line, and the treatment which he here received contributed largely to excite his ambition, and engender the highest feelings of admiration for the art. His warmest desires now, were to become a finished and accomplished artist, but such was his position that he could not at that time procure the necessary leisure to forward his design, being compelled to labor at the printing press in order to assist his father, who had encountered some reverses of fortune.

As his labors contributed to the support of a beloved mother, and a large family of sisters, they were cheerfully given, and his favorite study for a while abandoned.

But the inborn desire only slept to be awakened to higher pursuits and more daring enterprise. In 1842, observing that nothing but a disordered and unseemly heap of bricks marked the spot in Trinity church yard, where rested the remains of the gallant Commodore Lawrence, his soul was humiliated by the neglect of the hero's grave. Burning with ardent patriotism he resolved, that a monument of native marble should adorn the spot; and if the wealthy corporation or the nation could not be induced to rear some mark of remembrance he would do so himself.

This was a gigantic enterprise for a young man of only five and twenty. His plan to accomplish his purpose, may be judged by the following extract from the Commercial Advertiser of that year.

“DOINGS AMONG THE CITY FATHERS. Both Boards met last evening at the usual hour.

In the Board of Aldermen a communication was read from Gabriel Harrison, who sets forth that he is a native American—his soul fired with patriotism, and his cheek mantled with a tinging blush at the neglect of the remains of the immortal Lawrence, now lying entombed in the rear of Trinity Church. He farther sets forth that he is an amateur artist, and intends to execute some designs he has formed to illustrate the battles of Lawrence. These pictures he will exhibit throughout the country, and with the proceeds of such exhibition will erect a splendid monument over the remains of the hero. The monument will be completed within three years.

The object of the communication to the board was to give “publicity” to his patriotic enterprise.

Ald. Crolius said if there were a committee on patriotism, he would move to refer the paper to that committee, but as there was not, he moved a reference to the committee on arts and sciences, and it was so referred.”

Surrounded by uncommon difficulties he still continued at his pictures, and in two years had the satisfaction of seeing them completed. He now had them handsomely framed, at a cost of one hundred dollars; and, somewhat altering the detail of his plan, took them to Albany with the following prospectus, for the purpose of inducing Governor Bouck to head his committee.

#### A MONUMENT TO CAPTAIN JAMES LAWRENCE.

“The Undersigned would respectfully beg leave to call the attention of his fellow citizens to the enterprise which he has undertaken—an enterprise which has been suggested by the purest patriotism, and an abiding desire to see justice done to the memories of the brave men who gave their talents and their lives to their country's service.

“Captain James Lawrence, that gallant man, whose last words, ‘Don't give up the Ship,’ have become the war cry of our Navy,—lies unhonored and forgotten in an obscure corner of Trinity Church Yard. The shabby and *economical monument* which was erected to mark the spot, and to perpetuate for a day the memory of the brave sailor, has fallen before the storms of twenty years and its ruins now lie the silent proof of a Republic's ingratitude. The undersigned has noticed with indignation this shameful neglect, and feeling a warm desire to wipe the charge of ingratitude from his country's name has painted three views of engagements during the late war which will be engraved. The first—a view of the action between the Wasp and Frolic. The second—a view of the battle between the Hornet, commanded by Capt. LAWRENCE and H. B. M. Ship Peacock, and the third—The Rescue of the crew of the Peacock by the Boats of the Hornet.

“These views will be engraved in Mezzotint in the highest style of the art by American artists and will be afforded to subscribers for \$3 per copy, in advance. The proceeds deducting the expenses of the Engraving and Printing, will be vested in the hands of Trustees, and applied to the purpose of erecting a Monument to the memory of Captain LAWRENCE. The work to be performed by Native Artists, and to be constructed of American Marble.

“I appeal to every true-hearted American, to embrace this opportunity, giving them the honor of bestowing their mite towards the erection of a monument to the memory of one who sacrificed his life for our good; let our motto be,

‘DON’T GIVE UP THE SHIP.’

GABRIEL HARRISON.”

“The following distinguished Gentlemen have kindly and Patriotically consented to form a Board of Trustees:

Governor WILLIAM C. BOUCK,

Maj. Gen. George S. Dought,

Maj. Gen. Charles W. Sandford,

“ John Lloyd,

Commissary Gen. Henry Storms,

Brig. Gen. George P. Morris,

“ William L. Morris,

“ Thomas S. Cummings,

“ Frederick E. Mather,

Captain John T. Cairns,

“ Alexander Purdy,

“ Thomas N. Cazneau,

“ John Mayher,

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G. A. Worth, Esq.

Charles P. Harrison, Esq.

On his return from Albany a meeting of the Committee took place at the Arsenal, at which a resolution was passed desiring Mr. Harrison to bring his pictures there for a private exhibition. To this exhibition three of the best artists of New York were invited, for the purpose of critically examining the pictures, with a view to determine whether they were really of sufficient value to be engraved. Thomas S. Cummings was Chairman of this Committee of artists. It is unnecessary to say, the pictures were declared to be of great worth, while the young artist was by all most generously congratulated. The

opinions of the press at the time may be gathered from the following notices taken from the New York papers. The Daily News contains the following:

THE LAWRENCE MONUMENT.—We take the following description of the painting from the *New York Military Argus*:

“‘ACTION BETWEEN THE WASP AND FROLIC.’

“In our last number we briefly alluded to the proceedings of the ‘Lawrence Monument Committee,’ and also mentioned having seen one of the three paintings by Mr. Gabriel Harrison, from which the engravings are to be taken and furnished to each subscriber to the monument for the purpose of defraying the expenses of its erection.

“This painting it must be understood, is the work of a young and entirely self-taught artist, it being only five years since Mr. Harrison, as an amateur, first took pencil in hand. In giving our judgment on this picture we do not pretend to do so by strict critical rules, but altogether from the effect produced on us by its natural beauties, which are most striking, although we believe it will stand the test of the severest criticism in all points of art.

“The painting represents the moment when the Wasp runs the Frolic aboard on the larboard bow under a heavy fire from her quarter and bow guns, the red glare from which is reflected on the bows of the Frolic, and partially tinges the volumes of smoke which curl up and obscure a portion of the American vessel. The shock of the two vessels coming in contact has caused the Frolic to heel over slightly to the starboard, placing her rather in a perilous situation, while the discharge of the heavy guns from the Wasp has made her recoil, partly burying her hull in the crest of the angry wave which leaps around her, dashing its white foam in spray from the sides; this is to the life.

“The sky presents a lowering appearance, and is very neatly colored. Many times have we witnessed such a sky at sea, where alone it can be seen. Rays of light from above faintly stream down on the two vessels, seeming like a sorrowful gleam from the eye of heaven penetrating through the dark and heavy clouds. This watery sun light, if we may be allowed the expression, is managed by the artist with great skill, and serves as ’twere, to light up his picture, and yet allowing it to retain the sullen gloomy grandeur of stormy cloud and ocean.

“The vessels are both well and truthfully drawn; the eye of a nautical man can discover no inaccuracies; and to our judgment, and we are happy to say to the judgment of others of well tried and known critical taste, it is a natural painting of truth and spirit, reflecting great credit on the artist, and fully deserving the purpose to which it is applied.”

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*The next is from the Herald.*

“MONUMENT TO LAWRENCE.—The project to erect a Monument to the gallant Lawrence, we are gratified to learn, has been received with universal favor, and there is scarcely a doubt that the patriotic efforts of the gentleman who originally suggested the means by which it can be accomplished, will be crowned with success.

“The Board of Trustees, of which Governor Bouck is President, is composed of gentlemen of acknowledged patriotism and liberality, and we trust that our fellow citizens will co-operate with them, in an undertaking to commemorate the worth and virtue of one of the brightest and bravest ornaments of our gallant navy.”

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*The Sunday Times expresses the following opinion:*

“THE MONUMENT TO LAWRENCE.—This noble enterprise is going bravely on. At a large and enthusiastic meeting held at the Arsenal, the picture representing the engagement of the Wasp and Frolic was exhibited. It is a magnificent painting, and worthy the pencil of an older artist. The representation of the mist and the smoke of the guns upon the water are admirable. In short, the whole picture does credit to Mr. Harrison, who first conceived the project of erecting a monument to the gallant Lawrence. He is a young self-taught artist, but is destined to assume a high rank in his profession. We hope the citizens of New York will co-operate in the matter, and pay a just tribute to the memory of one who fought and died for his country, and show the world that the American people, although tardy, are not ungrateful.”

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*From the Sun.*

NEW YORK, Sunday Afternoon,  
21st July, 1844.

To GABRIEL HARRISON,

Sir—Having read in the columns of the New York “Argus” your prospectus for erecting a Monument to the memory of Captain James Lawrence; and believing it to be, as you there declare, “an enterprise which has been suggested by the purest patriotism, and an abiding desire to see justice done to the memories of the brave men who gave their talents and their lives to their country’s service,”—I, as a citizen of this republic, although a stranger to yourself, cannot refrain from conveying to you thus the admiration your enterprise has awakened in my mind, and which sentiment must fill the bosom of every American, for the man (a private individual) whose love of country and veneration for its heroes has given impulse to an enterprise already exerted upwards of two years, for the purpose of redeeming his country from the stigma of ingratitude to one of its departed heroes.

Sir, your appeal to every true-hearted American, to embrace the opportunity you have offered them of bestowing their mite for this purpose, must be cheerfully responded to,

“Lives there a man with soul so dead  
Whom never to himself hath said  
This is my own, my native land?”

Let us hope—not one. And if this remembrance be cherished, this love felt for our native land, what must we feel for the heroes who have fought, bled and died, to substantiate its glory and defend its rights?

Yes, sir, I repeat with confidence, your patriotic appeal must be responded to by every American in the manner you desire. You must prosper in this undertaking. Is there one of your countrymen who will not cheerfully give his mite towards filling up the subscription for the three Paintings named in your Prospectus—1st, The Action between the Wasp and Frolic;—2nd A View of the Battle between the Hornet, commanded by Captain Lawrence and H. B. M. ship Peacock,—3d, The Rescue of the Crew of the Peacock by the Crew of the Hornet.”

The names you have united as a Board of Trustees give evidence of success. At the first meeting of this Board, which I am rejoiced to observe will take place this week, no doubt such steps will be taken, in arranging a proper committee of action, as will speedily carry into effect your patriotic enterprise and I trust you will be enabled to thank all other authorities and committees for the able manner in which they have encouraged and sustained you, in much the same way as the celebrated Doctor Johnson did Lord Chesterfield who, at the conclusion of the Doctor’s gigantic literary labor, his Dictionary, complimented him highly on the work, and offered

his assistance &c. in its publication. The Doctor politely thanked his Lordship for the extent of his patronage and his very valuable assistance, but declined accepting either, remarking, now that he had circumnavigated the vast ocean of letters, and safely arrived within sight of port, he could dispense with the pilotage of his Lordship's little cock-boat, and would find secure anchorage for himself.

May this be your case, sir, and may you proudly boast of having, by your own energy and perseverance, given another proof of the indomitable character and spirit of the American people, which has caused the eyes of the world to be fixed upon them, and millions to exclaim "they are a great and enterprising people."

Your motto, sir, like your purpose, should be purely American—"First be sure you're right, then go ahead," and "Don't give up the ship."

If you succeed, and with this motto you must, a monument will arise to the memory of the hero Lawrence, perpetuating his fame and his country's gratitude, and your individual enterprise will receive the admiration and thanks of millions, of which number, allow me, sir, to subscribe myself,  
ONE.

Immediately subsequent to this, and while the fire of laudable patriotism was yet burning in the bosoms of the committee already named, a sub-committee was appointed to make arrangements with Mr. John Sartain, of Philadelphia, to engrave the plates; for each of which he was to receive five hundred dollars. The pictures were transferred to Mr. Sartain and he began the work.

By this time Mr. Harrison had expended nearly four hundred dollars in forming his committee, in advertising, printing and framing; beside the immense loss of time, which was to him of the utmost importance. But, as is usual with these excessively patriotic furors, after one or two meetings had been held, he could seldom procure the attendance of more than four or five of his committee. Of course the whole project crumbled to the earth through the most shameful neglect, while the artist was permitted to lose all he had ventured in the noble enterprize, together with his pictures (worth at least three hundred dollars,) as Mr. Sartain held, *and still holds them*, for the work which he had completed in the first plate.

After experiencing so perfect a failure and the utter want of generous and national zeal among others, most men would have totally abandoned the undertaking, but there are souls which remain undaunted through the most searching trials, and Mr. Harrison's was one of these. Such men form the true spirits of an age, and to them the rest of the world gaze with wondering eyes—incapable of discerning the operation of a measure the glorious incentive to which is entirely beyond their weak and timid imagining. If he could not perfect his design as projected on his original design, he could change the features of his glorious strife, and thus accomplish something for the ashes of the heroic Lawrence.

He had performed his part—he had completed his pictures, but the engraver would not continue his work without being furnished with his pay. Mr. Harrison's means were exhausted—all gone for an unaccomplished object, still he was undaunted, and with the dying words of the brave Lawrence, "Don't give up the ship!" burning in the utmost recesses of his soul, he looked about him for some new and more effective mode of warfare. That terrific weapon—the pen—presented itself, and though unaccustomed to controversial engagements, he commenced a series of severe and startling articles against the vestry of Trinity Church. The publication of these cost him one hundred dollars; when, in the very midst of his hottest fire, he was requested to discontinue writing. At the same time he was informed that a meeting of the vestry had been held and a resolution

passed to place a new monument over the grave of Lawrence.—They at last did so, and the work reflects much credit upon their taste and feeling, yet the merit of its erection *belongs exclusively* to Gabriel Harrison, as it is hardly probable, that had he not turned his attention to the subject and raised the whole nation in a storm of worthy indignation, the sightless mass of crumbling bricks would still have been the only monument to the dauntless Captain of the Chesapeake.

Young Harrison has been already richly rewarded for his noble sacrifices in this worthy cause, for during the past summer, while at Newport, Rhode Island, he was accidentally discovered by the widow of Captain Lawrence, who treated him with marked attention, and called him, as he truly is, “The preserver of her dear husband’s grave!” She presented him with a copy of the portrait of her husband, which was done by the great Stewart.

Mr. Harrison was at Newport taking daguerreotypes, when he was accosted by an elderly lady, as he stood at the door of the gallery, with the question “I believe you take likenesses here?” He replied that he did, and asked her in. She began examining his collection, when her eye was arrested by one of his cards upon the table. “Gabriel Harrison!” said she, reading the card;—“do you know Gabriel Harrison?” He replied, “I am Gabriel Harrison, madam.” “I thought so!” exclaimed the lady—and was excessively overcome.

This was the widow of Captain Lawrence, and when she recovered, she stated that she supposed he was Gabriel Harrison, when she first accosted him, but was not certain.

She invited him to dine with some young officers, at her house, and he was astonished upon entering the parlor, to find a rough daguerreotype likeness of himself, hung up by the side of her husband’s picture. It was by this likeness that the noble lady had been enabled to recognize him at the door of the gallery.

But we are running too free in advance of our history. In 1844, a New York paper spoke of Mr. Harrison as having “brought destruction on himself and family by his unceasing endeavors to raise a monument to the memory of Lawrence. It will be remembered that after he had spent a considerable sum in endeavoring to produce a patriotic feeling on the subject, the committee on whom he relied for assistance forsook him; and his meritorious conduct was passed by without one mark of the approval of his fellow citizens. Even the editors of the ———, by *some accident*, neglected to give him credit for the engraving he presented to that paper, even on the day it adorned its pages.”

The same year (1844,) banknote printing became rather unprofitable, and Mr. Harrison was compelled to turn his attention elsewhere in order to procure a sustenance for himself and family. His artistic eye soon fell upon daguerreotyping, and he resolved to make himself acquainted with the process. For this purpose he shortly after made application to Mr. John Plumbe, who was at that time at the head of the profession. After being but two weeks in Mr. Plumbe’s establishment, Mr. Butler, Mr. Plumbe’s head man, very kindly gave him permanent employment. Here he remained over three years, where he soon became a favorite with Mr. Plumbe’s customers, and contributed as much toward his fame, as any one in his employment.

In 1845, when at the Washington Fair, D. C., Mr. Harrison’s picture of Martin Van Buren, and one of a boy clinging around the bust of Washington, which was placed on a pedestal, were highly extolled in numerous papers, and took the first premium.

He was perfectly delighted with daguerreotyping, and ascertained directly that the art was capable of being greatly extended and largely improved. This he perceived with regard to the tone of pictures, while he saw that but few daguerrians paid much attention

to position. Coming from a family of artists, and being himself a painter, he had great advantage over most of the operators; nor did he lose time in testing the accuracy of the opinions he had formed of the capabilities of the process. Most of those engaged in the profession appear to have regarded it as merely a mechanical and chemical operation; seldom experimenting upon graceful position, bold folds in drapery or proper tone to pictures. Having paid much attention to these points, Mr. Harrison began at once to examine the choicest works on art, such as Alliston's and Reynolds's Lectures on Art, from which he derived immense advantage in his new pursuit. Rapt and enthusiastic in his profession, the moment that he conceived the delightful idea of throwing a portrait into a finished picture, his next endeavor, after a proper study of drapery, was to change the usual cold, frosty tone (so common in ordinary daguerreotypes,) in order to produce decidedly those three tints positive, high lights, middle tint, and shadow; without which no painting, drawing or daguerreotype can be considered good. In these efforts Mr. Harrison has been extremely successful, and his pictures have drawn the highest encomiums from such men as C. C. Ingham, C. E. Elliott, Doughty, and many other distinguished artists.

By many he has been declared to excel any other daguerrean in the country, and by all it is admitted that he is not surpassed. The superiority of his skill is evinced in the fact that he now does more work *for artists* than any other in the profession in the city.

Mr. Harrison's active disposition and rather nervous temperament has also had the effect of causing him to be somewhat mingled in politics. In 1848 he took an active part in the Free Soil cause. He was a member of the Corresponding Committee with John Van Buren, Benjamin F. Butler, and others. He was likewise chosen a representative of the twelfth assembly district for the Utica Convention, which resulted in the choice of Martin Van Buren as a candidate for the presidency. At that convention he made a speech which was very highly extolled by his friends, and gained him much credit with his party. Mr. Harrison was also a delegate to the first Judicial Convention held in accordance with the new constitution of this State. His friends have frequently solicited him to become a candidate for the Legislature, but he has invariably declined, on the ground that it requires lawyers and not artists to make laws.

In 1849 Mr. Harrison went into the daguerrean gallery of Mr. M. M. Lawrence, 203 Broadway, where he has done more to establish his fame as a daguerrean, than at any other place; from the fact that Mr. Lawrence possesses the most eminent artistic judgment—is an excellent friend—a most worthy and estimable gentleman, and will have the very best material and instruments without regard to their cost. If a daguerrean cannot improve and excel in the establishment of Mr. Lawrence, and amid the abundant facilities there afforded, he can have neither the taste or judgment for an artist. With such a friend and the most liberal supply of best material, Mr. Harrison has attained to the first position as a faithful, tasteful and artistic daguerrean.

Mr. Harrison is the first person who has produced *descriptive daguerreotypes*—that is—put poetry in types as well as in pictures. One of these specimens which is greatly admired, is styled, "Past, Present, and Future." Artists and poets have been lavish in the commendation of this exquisite picture, and so delighted have they been with his beautiful fancy sketches in daguerreotype, that he is now almost universally known as the *Poet Daguerrean*. Indeed the poets have taken him into their special favor. One of his sketches represents his son, George Washington Harrison, clinging around a pedestal upon which rests a bust of the immortal Washington. This charming conception has been

made the subject of some delightful verses which we give below, from the pen of the distinguished Eliza C. Hurley.

Aye, cling around that pedestal,  
Look up thou bright eyed boy,  
Behold thy country's ornament  
Which time will not destroy.

Cling to his mantle till it falls,  
About thy graceful form,  
'Till admiration for his worth,  
Doth thy young senses warm.

'Tis honor at his feet to kneel,  
Glory is in the deed,  
For by his greatness and his might.  
Thy country, Boy, was freed.

Look up,—Look up, 'tis Washington!  
Oh! fix on him thy gaze,  
His noble, his heroic mind  
Fill'd Nations with amaze!

Strain every nerve to reach the mark,  
The height to which he soar'd;  
Who proved the glory of his day  
By the whole world ador'd.

Mr. Harrison is likewise the first operator who has, to any degree been successful in taking what are called “double whole plate pictures;” that is—pictures three times the size of any heretofore taken. This single fact speaks volumes for his untiring energy and consummate skill.

It is pleasing to find that in the midst of his laborious employment Mr. Harrison still pursued his favorite design of painting, employing his leisure moments upon original designs of landscapes. He has produced three or four pieces which do credit to his taste in composition, and his accuracy as an artist both in drawing and coloring. His “Pathway to the Mountain Torrent” has drawn forth the warmest and well-deserved praise of Doughty, Ingham, Fisher, Elliott and others of distinguished reputation; who all welcome him among the painters, and look forward to the eminence he must attain if he continues to paint. Mr. Ingham, the Vice-President of the National Academy of Design, has given him the most flattering encouragement, and urged upon him to persevere in his delightful and successful pursuit.

For some unknown cause the American Art Union has treated Mr. Harrison most shamefully. They first invited him to send his pictures to their Gallery, that the managers might make purchases of him. After keeping each picture for five or six weeks, they returned them to him with the frames broken and disfigured; and, as we understand, *without explanation*. These facts coming to the ears of a few of Mr. Harrison's friends, among them Judge Waterbury, John Cochran, Benjamin F. Butler, John A. Dix and John Van Buren, they declared that a young American artist of such great merit, should not be thus cruelly cast aside for want of patronage. They have therefore very kindly purchased all the paintings which the Art Union so insultingly turned away.

And now—after years of hardship, Mr. Harrison finds himself beginning to reap the reward of his incessant application and unwavering fortitude. With his credit as a finished daguerrean drawing constant attention toward him, and his progress as a painter raising up for him a host of friends among the most accomplished and distinguished in the art, while he is yet a young man; we predict for him a brilliant position amid the most eminent of his countrymen. And, yet, he was but a poor friendless and untutored boy, and has been compelled to submit to insults in places where courage and genius such as his should have been fostered and protected. When his darling project of raising a new tomb to Lawrence was accomplished—the ashes of the hero were transferred to their new resting place without pomp or display. The military made no effort, the vestry no plan to commemorate the event. Mr. Harrison himself made arrangements for firing a salute over the grave, and paid *the money in advance*, in order to secure the fulfilment of his desire—a proper form which the carpet knights of the street columns had mysteriously forgotten and neglected. The day and the hour arrived, but the salute was not fired. Mr. Harrison was not present, and no signal announced the second deposit of the remains of Lawrence. Some of the papers of the day laid all the censure upon Mr. Harrison, and contemptuously asked where he was. It would have been much more noble to have inquired first privately, and if there was cause found, they might have sneered. Had they made the least effort for the man who had done so much in so good a cause, they would have discovered that at the precise hour when the salute was to have been fired, Mr. Harrison was standing at the grave of his devoted mother.

We have now traced Gabriel Harrison through his chequered and eventful life, and the reader cannot have failed to mark the uncommon energy and determined resolution of the man throughout. It is to these qualities that he owes his success in his various occupations and pursuits. Overcome by no reverses—staid by no obstacles—vanquished by no accumulating disasters, with the object of his ambition constantly before him, he has advanced step by step in his onward course. His path has not been through the gay aisles of a flower garden where the rich perfumes of nature, surrounded his way; but it has been over the steep cliffs and the rugged and stony road of trial and difficulty, where the sufferings of those near and dear to him have added to the cup of his affliction. A weaker heart or a soul less devoted to the consciousness of truth, would have often paused by the way and stood appalled at the threatening clouds that gathered around him; but he seems to have collected new strength at every requisition made upon his fortitude, and under the most severe and cutting rebuffs, he has risen unexpected to fresher exertions—more toilsome labor and more exalted flights toward the temple of fame. There is a vacant niche in that glorious fame yet to be filled with the name of Gabriel Harrison.

**[End of text.]**

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**EDITOR'S NOTES:**

Additional information regarding Harrison (1818–1902) is found in Grant Romer, “Gabriel Harrison: the Poetic Daguerrean,” *Image: Journal of Photography and Motion Pictures of the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House* 22:3 (September 1979): 8–18.

This article is the third of eight biographical sketches of eminent daguerreotypists appearing in the journal's first year of publication. Each profile is accompanied by a full-

page lithographic portrait. Other articles in this series are C. Edwards Lester, "M. B. Brady and the Photographic Art," 1:1 (January 1851): 36–40;<sup>1</sup> S. D. Burchard, "Martin M. Lawrence and the Daguerrean Art," 1:2 (February 1851): 103–106; 169–77;<sup>2</sup> J. P. Kidder, "Augustus Morand and the Daguerrean Art," 1:4 (April 1851): 237–39;<sup>3</sup> A. D. Cohen, "George S. Cook and the Daguerrean Art," 1:5 (May 1851): 285–87;<sup>4</sup> R. W. Keyes, "Luther Holman Hale and the Daguerrean Art," 1:6 (June 1851): 357–59;<sup>5</sup> M. Grant, "John A. Whipple and the Daguerrean Art," 2:2 (August 1851) 94–95;<sup>6</sup> J. W. Tracy, "D. D. T. Davie; First President of the Association of Daguerreotypists," 2:3 (September 1851): 164–65.<sup>7</sup>

An editorial note about the biographies and portraits provides this information:

—To those desiring the publication of their biographies and portraits in the Journal we will state that it will be necessary to communicate with us on the subject as early as possible in order that we may assign to each his month, there generally being several engaged ahead, and we are obliged to adopt the very good practice of serving applicants in the order of their application. We deem it necessary to state this much that there may not be any misunderstanding in the matter.<sup>8</sup>

A subsequent editorial response to correspondence provides additional information:

—W. T. [William H. Thomas?] of S. C.—In answer to your question we will say that you have been misinformed in regard to the matter. We make no charge for the insertion of portraits and biographies, although it is generally customary, among periodicals, to do so. The reputation of an operator as an artist must be good, in order to secure the privilege of placing his portrait in our Journal, but as it is undoubtedly of far more advantage to the artist than ourselves, we think it not more than right that he furnish the illustration free of expense to us. As to the style and cost of the portrait, we leave that entirely to the judgment and taste of the operator, requiring only, that the work be executed as nearly perfect as possible. Steel plates are decidedly the least trouble, and much preferable, as finer impressions and more uniform printing can be obtained from them. Lithographic drawings will not always print well, and we have had much trouble with them on that account. With one or two exceptions those who have inserted their portraits have purchased one hundred copies of the number containing it.<sup>9</sup>

A whole-plate daguerreotype by Harrison—similar in conception to the one described in the text—is in the collection of the George Eastman House, "Helia Harrison with a bust of George Washington."<sup>10</sup>

Harrison also contributed to the *Photographic Art-Journal*. See a two-part daguerreian-themed tale, "Lights and Shadows of Daguerrean Life," 1:3 (March 1851):179–181; 1:4 (April 1851): 229–32. See also Gabriel Harrison, "Brooklyn Art-Union," 2:5 (November 1851) 295–98; "The Dignity of our Art," 3:4 (April 1852): 230–32.<sup>11</sup>

Harrison also wrote concerning the drama. See Gabriel Harrison, *The Stratford Bust of William Shakespeare and a Critical Inquiry into its Authenticity and Artistic Merits* (Brooklyn: J. M. Bradstreet & Son, 1865; illustrated with two photographic views); Gabriel Harrison, *John Howard Payne: Dramatist, Poet, Actor, and Author of Home, Sweet Home; His Life and Writing* (New York: B. Blom 1969); Gabriel Harrison and Nathaniel Hawthorne, *A Centennial Dramatic Offering: A Romantic Drama, in Four Acts, entitled The Scarlet Letter, Dramatized from Nathaniel Hawthorne's Masterly Romance* (Brooklyn: H. M. Gardner, Jr., 1876); Gabriel Harrison, *A History of the Progress of the Drama, Music and the Fine Arts in the City of Brooklyn* (New York: W. W. Munsell & Co., 1884); Gabriel Harrison, *Edwin Forrest: the Actor and the Man* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Eagle Book Printing Dept., 1889).

The author of this lengthy text, Samuel Jones Burr, was an author, poet, and lyricist. a A graduate of Yale University, Burr is best known for his biography of W. H. Harrison. See

S. J. Burr, *The Life and Times of William Henry Harrison* (New York, L. W. Ransom, 1840). See also S. J. Burr, "The Indian Idea of the Origin of Echo," *American Melodies; containing a Single Selection from the Productions of Two Hundred Writers* (New York: Linen and Fennell, 1841):41-42; S. J. Burr and J. Gaspard Maeder, *Come to the Forest: the Indian Girl's Song: no. 11 Grand Fairy Opera of The Peri, or, The Enchanted Fountain* [musical score] (New York : William Hall & Son, 1852); S. J. Burr and J. Gaspard Maeder, *Dark Eyes* [musical score] (New York: William Hall & Son, 1859).

With reasonable certainty, Harrison (with top hat and walking stick) is part of the ensemble in the well-known tableaux daguerreotype, "California News."<sup>12</sup> Martin Lawrence, Harrison's son, and a fourth sitter are also featured.<sup>13</sup>

1. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510010\\_BRADY\\_PAJ\\_1851-01.pdf](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510010_BRADY_PAJ_1851-01.pdf)
2. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510013\\_LAWRENCE\\_PAJ\\_1851-02.pdf](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510013_LAWRENCE_PAJ_1851-02.pdf)
3. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510014\\_MORAND\\_PAJ\\_1851-04.pdf](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510014_MORAND_PAJ_1851-04.pdf)
4. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510011\\_COOK\\_PAJ\\_1851-05.pdf](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510011_COOK_PAJ_1851-05.pdf)
5. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510009\\_HALE\\_PAJ\\_1851-06](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510009_HALE_PAJ_1851-06)
6. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510015\\_WHIPPLE\\_PAJ\\_1851-08](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510015_WHIPPLE_PAJ_1851-08)
7. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510016\\_DAVIE\\_PAJ\\_1851-09](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510016_DAVIE_PAJ_1851-09)
8. *Photographic Art-Journal* (New York) 1:5 (May 1851): 319
9. *Photographic Art-Journal* (New York) 2:5 (November 1851): 319.
10. [http://64.40.114.138/GEH/C.aspx?VP3=ViewBox\\_VPage&IID=2F3XC5CZ5X60](http://64.40.114.138/GEH/C.aspx?VP3=ViewBox_VPage&IID=2F3XC5CZ5X60)
11. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8520007\\_HARRISON\\_DIGNITY\\_PAJ\\_1852-04.pdf](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8520007_HARRISON_DIGNITY_PAJ_1852-04.pdf)
12. <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/286059>
13. See blog dated 1 February 2015. <http://antiquecameras.net/blog.html>

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