

The South Street Connection: Joseph Smith, John Hansen, Conrad Freitag, Elisha Baker, and Antonio Jacobsen, Too

by A.J. Peluso, Jr.

New York City's 19th-century South Street abounded with creative energy. There were several self-styled "sculptors," one-time figurehead carvers who would gradually turn their attention to the better market in cigar-store Indians.¹ There was "Professor" Thomas at South Street and Old Slip, "up three flights." He was a self-proclaimed marine artist (that is, tattoo artist) who was "Not a marine [artist]

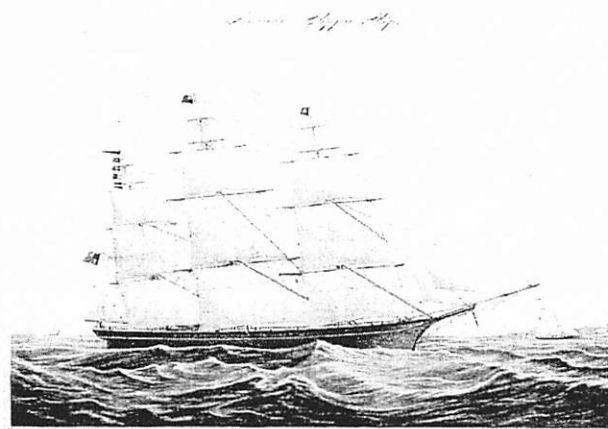
But then there were those who painted real ships on real oceans—on South Street.

of the kind that paint impossible ships on improbable oceans."²

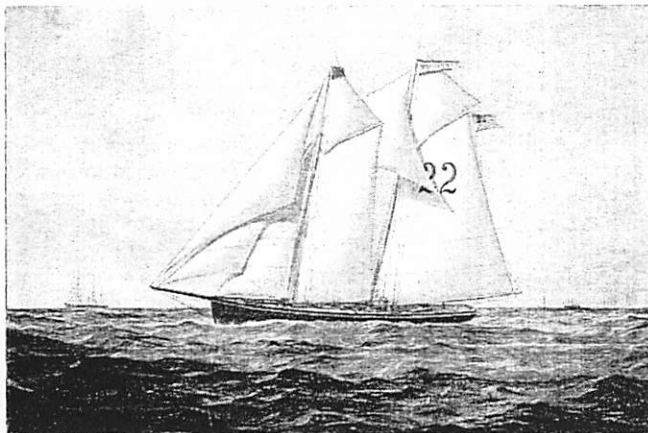
But then there *were* those who painted real ships on real oceans—on South Street. There were four. Recent research about one, John Hansen, suggests that there was a relationship among the artists Joseph B. Smith & Son, Conrad Freitag, and Elisha Taylor Baker.^{3,4}

The name Hansen is well known in Europe for the many Hansen eponymous ship portrait artists. Throughout the 19th century the name Hansen appeared frequently in Flensburg, Denmark and in Altona and Hamburg, Germany. John Hansen must have had family and professional ties to European Hansens. It seems probable, but the subject has not yet been addressed.⁵

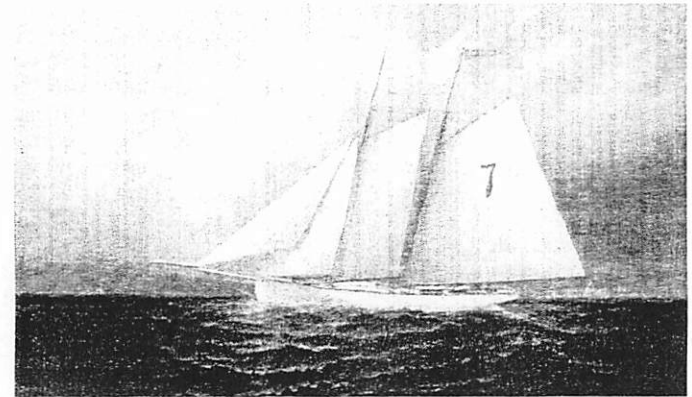
The following summary of available data seems sufficient to confirm that John Hansen was, indeed, an important member of the New York maritime artist fraternity. It appears, also, that his working years were brief. The known examples of his work only



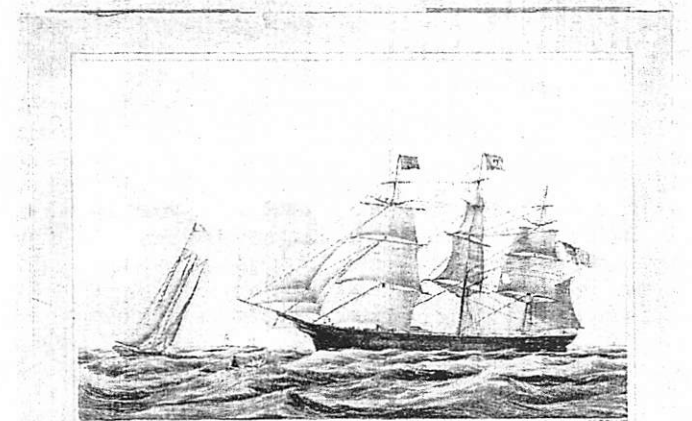
Ship *Wide Awake*, built by Perine, Patterson & Stack, colored lithograph, by Nagel and Weingartner, artist J. Hansen, on stone by Charles Parsons, circa 1863. Photo courtesy The Old Print Shop.



Pilot boat *Washington 22*, oil on canvas, by Conrad Freitag. Photo courtesy Christie's.



Pilot boat *Centennial 7*, oil on canvas, by Elisha Taylor Baker. Photo courtesy Christie's.



"*Hove To*" for a Pilot, after Joseph B. Smith. The clipper *Adelaide* was built by Grinnell, Minturn, & Co. of South Street. Photo courtesy Library of Congress.

It appears that Freitag, in 1870, Hansen, 1870; Smith

Hansens. It seems probable, but the subject has not yet been addressed.⁵

The following summary of available data seems sufficient to confirm that John Hansen was, indeed, an important member of the New York maritime artist fraternity. It appears, also, that his working years were brief. The known examples of his work only span the years 1850-70.

Directory entries and signature works, however, do tell us where and who he was:

- 1850, marine painter, 304 Pearl (New York City);
- 1856, artist, 164 Beekman, home Staten Island (NY);
- 1865, artist, 173 South Street (New York City).

His known lithographs include the following:

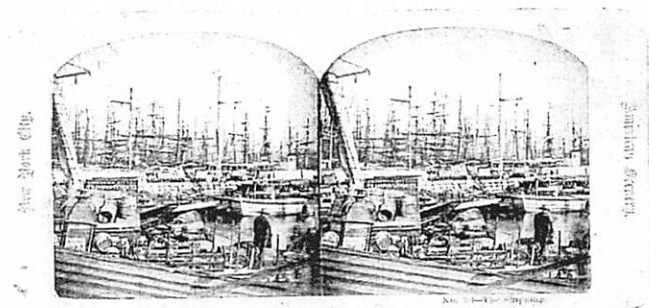
- Clipper ships *Ino*, *Agnes*, and *Maria* (1851);
- Clipper *Wide Awake* (1853), with pilot boat in background. "Drawn from nature and on stone by J. Hansen. Print by Nagel & Weingartner." *Ino* and *Wide Awake* were managed by the firm of Siffken & Ironside of New York and London;
- New York pilot boat *George W. Blunt 11*. Artist not listed, publisher J. Hansen. (The *Blunt* was launched in 1856);⁶
- Sanford's Independent Line of steamers between New York and Philadelphia via Cape May, steamer *Menemon Sanford*, Charles B. Sanford, commander, drawn by J. Hansen, printed by Nagel & Weingartner. (The *Sanford* was launched in 1856);
- New York pilot boat *Fannie 17*. Built by E.F. Williams. Drawn by J. Hansen. Published by J. Hansen. (The *Fannie* was launched in 1860);
- New York pilot boat *Mary A. Williams 19*, lithograph published by J. Hansen, drawn by J. Hansen. (The *Williams* was launched in 1861.)

All of his paintings are at the Mystic Seaport Museum:

- Schooner *America* (circa 1851);
- Bark *Jenny Lind* (launched circa 1851). This portrait is painted in a Continental style with a gray strip below the image on which vessel and painting details are inscribed;
- Ship *Fanny* (circa 1850);
- Ship *Eliza Mallory* (circa 1851);
- Clipper *Ino* (circa 1853).



Pilot boat *Washington 22*, oil on canvas, by Conrad Freitag. Photo courtesy Christie's.



East River docks on South Street with all those potential ship portraits.

These paintings all have connections to the Mystic seaport. *Jenny Lind*'s home port was Mystic. *Eliza Mallory* was built at Mystic. *Fanny*'s Captain E. Spicer was later captain of the *Mary L. Sutton* in 1856 and the schooner *California* in 1858, which "hales" [sic] from Mystic. From the above data we can theorize that Hansen began his career with a brief stay at Mystic, possibly painting ships built at the Greenman yards, but did the bulk of his work in New York.

His portrait of the yacht *America*, flanked by the U.S.S. *Niagara* and the Collins Line transatlantic steamship *Adriatic*, boasts an old plaque on the frame displaying an inscription: "USS *Niagara* and *Adriatic* Painted by Hansen 1856, Presented by James R. Steers Esq. 1906." This painting symbolized the diversity and importance of the many vessels designed by George Steers. Later, Hansen's historic painting of the U.S. flagship

Hartford meeting *Pilot Boat 4* (1865) was displayed at the Brooklyn yards where the *Hartford* was being refitted. It depicts, again, George Steers-designed vessels.⁷ The painting has not been located.

Coincidentally, in May 1865, Conrad Freitag mustered out of a veteran's hospital (from wounds he had suffered at Laurel Hill, on the march to Spotsylvania Court House). He notified the authorities that the proceeds of a pension should be addressed to 173 South Street in care of Hansen, who was operating out of the same address in 1865. We can guess that at some point after 1865 and before 1870 Hansen somehow ceded the pilot boat portrait business to Freitag. Hansen is not listed in directories after 1870. So for a time, they would have been contemporaries, certainly acquaintances, and possibly colleagues.

But in 1870 John Hansen, born in Denmark and aged 45, died suddenly of "apoplexy."⁸

"Hove To" for a Pilot, after Joseph B. Smith. The clipper *Adelaide* was built by Grinnell, Minturn, & Co. of South Street. Photo courtesy Library of Congress.

It appears that Freitag, in turn, was also obliged to share a part of his pilot boat business with Elisha Taylor Baker. Baker appeared in the directories between 1878 and 1890. His business cards from that period read "E.T. Baker, artist, 11 South 8th Street, Brooklyn and 104 South Street, N.Y.," or "Elisha T. Baker, marine painter, 315 Pearl and 104 South Sts., N.Y." That address is next door to the office of the New Jersey Pilot Association.

Although the Smiths had long since moved to Fulton Street in Brooklyn, an early business card from the 1840's lists "J. Smith & Son, Marine Artists, 90 Pike Street, Corner of South Street."

Even with this early group

gone (Hansen, 1870; Smith, 1876; Baker, 1890; and Freitag, 1894), the appeal of pilot boats was undiminished. The enterprising Antonio Jacobsen filled the void. He painted the *Joseph Pulitzer 20*, 1895 (now at the South Street Seaport Museum), named for the publisher of the *New York World*, and the *Ambrose Snow 2* (also at the South Street Seaport Museum), named for the commissioner of pilots. He sketched the *James Gordon Bennett 4* in 1890 (at the Mariners' Museum), the owner of the *New York Herald*, and the *Richard K. Fox* in 1896 (also at the Mariners' Museum), named for the proprietor of the *Police Gazette*.

And there are more.

Notes

1. Frederick Fried, *Artists in Wood*, New York, 1970.
2. "Tattooed Men for Spain," published in the "At the Sign of the Scissors" column in *Tid-Bits*, May 22, 1886.
3. A.J. Peluso, Jr., "Joseph B. Smith & Son: Marine Artists, and Their American Flag," *Maine Antique Digest*, March 2001.
4. A.J. Peluso, Jr., "Conrad Freitag and Caldwell H. Colt: Their Brief Lives and Times," *Maine Antique Digest*, November 1999.
5. Dorothy E.R. Brewington, *Dictionary of Marine Artists*, 1982, lists the following Hansens: A., B.H., C.R., Charles P., F.R., H.A., H.C., H.G., H.R., Heinrich, J., another J., J.R., and L. The following Hanssens are also listed, Gottfreid and K.C.H. Other sources list the following Hansens: Broder Heinrich, G., and J. Hansen, Jr.
6. George W. Blunt died in 1878 and was memorialized by the Board of Commissioners of Pilots, the Union League Club, the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, and the New York and Sandy Hook Pilots Association.
7. The George Steers relationship was hardly exclusive. Frances Palmer drew the clipper yacht *America* (c. 1851) for him, and William Marsh, Jr. painted his yacht *Julia*, "Modeled and built by George Steers," reproduced as a lithograph by W. Schaus in 1855.
8. U.S. Federal Census Mortality Schedule 1850-1885.

This second oil on canvas depicts the same three famous vessels that were designed by George Steers that appears in the previous plate. The reverse of the canvas has a canvas maker's label which states "GOUPIL & Co. 366 Broadway NEW-YORK." It is probable that this painting belonged to George Steers and that he commissioned it from the artist J. Hansen. This is the only painting of the period that we know that actually has the name AMERICA appearing on it. The only difference between the two Hansen paintings is that the ADRIATIC and the position of the NIAGARA are reversed. Based upon the plaque which appears on the opposite plate we have been able to identify the artist J. Hanson who worked near the Steer's shipyard in New York. The Yacht Club's painting was given by James R. Steers (1868-1936) who had inherited it from his father Henry (1831-1903) who received it from his father James R. Steers (1808-1896) who was George Steers brother. Henry and George worked together as designer and shipbuilder and were crew members on yacht AMERICA when she went to England for the race. It is probable that James and George with their involvement together on the three vessels in the painting each commissioned a copy of the painting.

Collection of Alan Granby and Janice Hyland

At the bow the curved trail board can be seen which was unique to America. Above the trail board and painted in gold is the name AMERICA.

Flying from the peak of the main topmast is a swallowtail version of the Union Jack and flying from the gaff with the stars arranged in a star pattern.

PA-9472 D	Detail of America
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