

# Daguerreotypes by Hartley Webster

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Known works by early New Zealand daguerreotypists are rare, being both scarce in number and difficult to identify. A reference in a journal entry by Rev. Charles Baker reported the creation of a “portrait in a machine” by Hartley Webster in 1852. Auckland Museum staff asked Baker family descendants about the existence of a daguerreotype matching the entry. This led to the discovery of two daguerreotypes inside a writing desk, one of which was labelled 1852. The pair were taken during a visit by Hartley Webster to the Bay of Islands and provide confirmed examples of his early work. This, in turn, has enabled the identification of further Webster works in the Auckland War Memorial Museum pictorial collection.

Hartley Webster was a daguerreotypist who operated in Auckland, arriving from England in 1852 on March 9th with his wife Elizabeth. He began offering his services as a 'Photographist, from London' in April, clearly wasting no time in establishing himself.<sup>1</sup> He could "take portraits in five seconds at a cost from ten shillings to two guineas."<sup>2</sup> In August that year he advertised his intention to stay in the Bay of Islands for a fortnight.<sup>3</sup> Webster was by this time aware of the limited Auckland market, seeking clients further afield. He would also engage in several other business ventures with his wife, ranging from millinery to saddlery.<sup>4</sup>

Though later work from Webster is well known, his early work is scarce. Later examples from the 1860s include his work in *cartes-de-visite* format, his coverage of officers of the 65<sup>th</sup> regiment and colourful characters like Gustavus Ferdinand von Tempsky, Prussian adventurer, artist and soldier in the New Zealand Wars. In the case of the *carte-de-visite* we are fortunate enough to have his studio text and verso logo printed on each example. Earlier work, however, is usually completely bereft of markings, certainly in the case of daguerreotypes. Some daguerreotypists in the United States were known to use embossed names or initials on the brass mat.<sup>5</sup> In New Zealand there were simply too few practitioners to warrant such proprietary delineation. The identification of daguerreotypes made in New Zealand involves the study of provenance and sitters alongside the physical evidence the actual piece presents. Did a sitter leave New Zealand and where were they based? Do diaries and letters mention such events? Do the daguerreotype cases, if original, fit within a particular style or time period?

The Rev. Charles Baker, a missionary who arrived in New Zealand in 1828, kept a series of journals which are held by Auckland War Memorial Museum. Working under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.), he and his family lived in a number of different areas such as Paihia, Waikare, Tolaga Bay and Rangitukia. In an entry from 18 October 1852 he makes mention of a visit to Russell.

"18 Went to Russell. Called on Capt Russell at the Wahapu & went on to town. Found Dr & Mrs Ford in affliction. Their youngest child but one (the oldest now surviving) is near its end. Spent some time there & went on to Mr Bateman's. A Mr Webster took my portrait in a machine. It is said to be a good likeness. Had tea with Rev Mr Gould & slept at Mr Batemans."<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1, Hartley Webster. Rev. Charles Baker. Quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1852. Mount size 157mm x 129mm. Private collection.



Figure 2, Hartley Webster. *Hannah Baker*. Quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1852.  
Mount size 157mm x 129mm. Private collection.



Figure 3, Unattributed. *Alexander Alison and his wife Jane*. Half-plate daguerreotype.  
Mount size 185mm x 155mm, PH-1995-9-1, Auckland War Memorial Museum.



Figure 4, Hartley Webster. *Archdeacon Henry Williams*. Quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1852.  
Case size 120mm x 95mm. PH-1964-2-1, Auckland War Memorial Museum.



Figure 6, Unattributed. *William Kemp*. Quarter-plate daguerreotype.  
Case size 120mm x 95mm. PH-1970-4-3, Auckland War Memorial Museum.



Figure 5, Hartley Webster. *Mrs. Henry Williams*. Quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1852.  
Case size 120mm x 95mm. PH-1964-1-1, Auckland War Memorial Museum.



Figure 7, Unattributed. *James Kemp*. Sixth-plate daguerreotype.  
Case size 95mm x 80mm. PH-1970-4-2, Auckland War Memorial Museum.

Baker's journal entry recording the creation of a mechanical portrait alongside a name such as Hartley Webster established the possible existence of a rare example of a New Zealand made daguerreotype. Auckland War Memorial Museum staff approached the Baker descendants prior to a recent family reunion and indeed it was found that a daguerreotype was extant, known to some of the family. Further investigation revealed there were, in fact, two daguerreotypes in identical cases (figures 1 & 2). The objects had been largely hidden from sight, kept in an ornate writing box in the bottom compartment of a writing desk that had belonged to Charles Baker. One portrait was of Charles, with a label on the verso, "Rev C. Baker 1852." The label does not match Baker's hand. The other was unlabelled but determined to be of his wife, Hannah Mariah Baker.

Baker was well known to many in the region. Staying with friends and fellow C.M.S. missionaries was a regular occurrence, as noted in his journal on numerous occasions.<sup>7</sup> The Bakers' close association with families such as the Kemp family features in travel from KeriKeri to Waimate.<sup>8</sup> In the months to come, word of Webster's work would have spread quickly throughout the region.

Hartley Webster's name has been associated with both daguerreotypes and calotypes by John Nicol Crombie, albeit unconfirmed.<sup>9</sup> Giles notes Crombie arrived late in Auckland not appearing on the scene until 1855, meaning his knowledge of Webster's early work may have been incomplete. During a visit to England, Crombie presented a paper on "The Rise and Progress of Photography in New Zealand" in which he referenced his predecessors, including one gentleman who arrived in the early part of 1851 and whom he credited as adding both the daguerreotype process to his skills as well as introducing the calotype process to that part of the world.<sup>10</sup> Both technologies were available in the early period of photography. However, without examples of this work, it has previously been difficult to attribute unidentified daguerreotypes from this time.

The discovery of two confirmed examples of Hartley Webster's daguerreotypes from 1852 presents an opportunity to directly observe his work from this early period. As regards style, the portraits are fairly conservative, having seated subjects facing the camera with hands on their laps. The images are heavily faded, obscuring their clarity in part. Mounted in the European style of presentation, unusual for New Zealand, these examples appear in a brown painted glass mount with a brass *passe-partout* (type of 'mat' placed between the picture and frame). They are sealed with a brown adhesive cloth tape. Most

examples of daguerreotypes made in New Zealand are presented in Morocco cases; small portable enclosures that protect the picture and allow for storage or display on a mantelpiece. The European style of glass *passe-partout* mount was designed for wall mounting in a wooden frame.<sup>11</sup> The confirmation that Hartley Webster used such mounting is helpful in that it may point towards other works presented in the European style, such as a large unattributed daguerreotype held at Auckland War Memorial Museum featuring Mr and Mrs Alison (figure 3). Curiously, the inward face of the paper backing of the daguerreotype of the Alison couple features an advertisement for an H. Webster, importer and dealer of cigars, Portsmouth. Hartley Webster is identified as a corn dealer in the 1851 census (incorrectly entered as Harthy), also under Portsmouth with his wife Elizabeth.<sup>12</sup> Though they appear to be the same man, the clipping could have been used by anyone as backing paper for a daguerreotype. It is nonetheless uncanny to find it on another New Zealand-made example presented in *passe-partout* style and sealed with a brown adhesive cloth tape. The 1853 electoral roll lists Alexander Alison as a shipwright in Official Bay, which would have afforded easy access to Webster's services.<sup>13</sup>

Close inspection of the Hannah Baker daguerreotype (figure 2) shows a different setting to the Charles Baker portrait. The back of the wooden chair has a crochet cushion visible behind the sitter. Charles' journal makes mention of another visit to Russell on October 30<sup>th</sup>, this time by his wife and son.

"30 Mrs Baker & Charles returned. They had had the great pleasure of seeing Archdeacon & Mrs Williams who they met at Russell. The whole party were together two days and two nights."<sup>14</sup>

Not only is this likely to be the occasion on which the Hannah Baker portrait was taken, but it also leads to another striking connection, that of Henry and Marianne Williams. Archdeacon Henry Williams, an early C.M.S. missionary who played an important role in the translation of the Treaty of Waitangi, and his wife Marianne were regular acquaintances of the Bakers. Inspection of the Auckland War Memorial Museum daguerreotypes of both Henry and Marianne (figures 4 & 5) reveal the very same chair with the same crochet pattern cushion behind them. The chair and crochet cushion have been used for all three portrait sittings; Hannah Baker (figure 2), Henry and Marianne Williams (figures 4 & 5). When this is taken into consideration alongside

the journal entry, which stated they were together, it is clear that Hartley Webster took all three daguerreotypes on this occasion. In a recent paper, the author wrote of the possibility of a hitherto unknown Baker daguerreotype in relation to the Williams pair, citing an earlier 20 October entry in the journal where Charles met Henry and Marianne Williams.<sup>15</sup> It was only after examining the unexpected Hannah Baker daguerreotype, however, that the creation of the Williams daguerreotypes could be placed within the events described above on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1852.

Bringing together the evidence for these sittings suggests that Hartley Webster was based in Russell for a good portion of his time in the Bay of Islands, possibly at Thomas Bateman's residence. His clients included Charles Baker on 18 October and Hannah Baker, Henry Williams and Marianne Williams on 30 October. Notable names to be investigated further are the Batemans, the Fords and Captain Russell.

The early work of daguerreotypist Hartley Webster can now be observed through four confirmed examples of quarter plate daguerreotypes. The authentication of early Hartley Webster works of the Baker and Williams couples provides an opportunity for further comparison with other surviving examples. The mounting alone may have been shared by a number of daguerreotypists in a given shipment, and indeed, the four Webster daguerreotypes presented here show different housings for contemporaneous plates, with the Bakers in *passee-partout* mounts and the Williams in morocco cases with plain brass mats. This suggests Webster's customers had a degree of choice in their purchase. It is remarkable, however, that such variety was on offer to such an early and relatively sparse market. Previous advertisements of daguerreotypes in New Zealand newspapers have made mention of morocco cases.<sup>16</sup> John Nicol Crombie listed an extensive assortment of cases, plain and ornamented<sup>17</sup>, along with daguerreotype apparatus, so perhaps offering a variety of mounting options was common practice. Once demand was established, a larger variety of imported cases became available.

Further daguerreotypes at Auckland War Memorial Museum are mounted in cases identical to the Williams pair; those of brothers William Kemp and James Kemp (Figures 6 & 7). Living in close association with the Bakers, the family of C.M.S. Missionary James Kemp could have similarly taken advantage of the opportunity presented by Webster's visit to the region. At the very least the identical cases and mounting presented here suggest contemporaneity, all being early in style. Nolan's dating guide to American daguerreotypes

places the plain ecliptic mat either side of 1852 depending on source (American or British).<sup>18</sup> New Zealand's supply of cases could have come from several possible locations, so it is difficult to know how reliable such case chronology is to a local context. The Kemp brothers' cases are very plain with a maroon velvet pad, the same as Henry Williams example. This has been noted as early in use in the United States of America context.<sup>19</sup> The Marianne Williams daguerreotype features a lighter brown velvet pad not present in the aforementioned guide. Though similar, these can only prove contemporaneous use and not direct attribution.

It is clear is that Hartley Webster's work, although limited to the small market of the day, was presented in both attractive European *passee-partout* glass mounts as well as Morocco cases. It is also possible that rehoused examples of his work exist, as cases could have been changed when later more embellished styles became available. His visit to the Bay of Islands in 1852 brought him into contact with some of the prominent missionaries of the day, and may have reached other individuals within the region whose daguerreotype portraits have either survived in private hands or are no longer extant. There is also the possibility of a calotype and resulting salt print mentioned by Crombie.<sup>20</sup> Though no examples are extant, the mere mention of the use of this technology demands further investigation. Further research into the journals of missionaries and other notable families for whom daguerreotypes were affordable is required. Perhaps the experience of having your portrait taken with a machine warranted a mention in someone else's diary or even in a letter.

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## ENDNOTES

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- 2 Ibid.
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- 4 Keith Giles, "Hartley Webster: Auckland's First Resident Professional Photographer." *NZ Legacy* 20, no.1 (2008): 5-6.
- 5 Nolan, Sean. "Dating American Daguerreotypes." *Daguerreotype Journal* (Autumn 2015): 30.
- 6 Rev. Charles Baker, "Journal of Charles Baker," 1852, Charles Baker – Papers, MS-22, Auckland War Memorial Museum (Auckland): 18.
- 7 In the space of a few days in April 1852 Baker recorded visits in his journal to Capt Wright, Capt Russell, Dr Montgommery, Mr Busby, Clendon Ford & Bateman, Mrs Selwyn and more.
- 8 Ibid. 7-16 June 1852.
- 9 Keith Giles, "Hartley Webster: Auckland's First Resident Professional Photographer." *NZ Legacy* 20, no.1 (2008): 5.
- 10 New Zealander, "Photography," November 25, 1864: 4.
- 11 Denise Bethel, "Notes on an Early Daguerreotype of Walt Whitman," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 9 (Winter 1992): 148-53. Bethel discusses the *pas-*  
*partout* mount in some detail, referring to these European or even French examples as evidence of the New Orleans origin of a daguerreotype. Specifically, the writer also makes mention of the nature of backing paper as evidence, offering a New Orleans newspaper as further proof of locality.
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