

Gen. A. P. [redacted]

Washington 16th May 1846

Sir,

As there is a great disposition on the part of many members, to reduce the price of printing now established, I take the liberty of calling your attention to the following copy of a letter from John B. River, Esq., whose years of experience in the printing business, qualifies him as a competent person to judge of the effects of such a reduction as proposed by Mr. Niles' resolution.

Washington 11 Feb'y 1846

Sir,

I have received your letter dated yesterday & you must take a brief answer, or get none at all, as I am very busy. A Committee of the Ho. Reps. propounded to me a month or six weeks ago some 20 or 3 questions relative to printing, & I have not yet found time to answer a single one of them. I intended to try to find time within the next week to answer the Committee. To most of their questions, I intend to refer the Committee to my answers to a committee of the House on the subject of printing at the session of 1839-40. With all my experience since that time, I would not now, as well as I can recollect those answers, (I have not read them for years) alter my part of them, now than from 5 to 10 per cent. I refer you to them. I forget the number of the Report; the index to the Reports will point it out.

You ask me if I think you & Mr. Ritchie can in justice to yourselves continue to execute the printing of Congress, if Senator Niles' proposed reduction should become a law; or, in other

words, whether you would not sink money
out it. You cannot do good printing, on good paper,
& do it in good time, & do a good business, if Mr. Niles'
bill shall become a law, unless Congress should
order a great many good jobs. Congress printing
is more of a lottery than any other business.
Making money on it depends upon the copy
being good, being sent regularly, the printer never
being without copy, & not too much hurried.

And when all these contingencies work together
for the printer's good, which they seldom if ever
do, he cannot make money enough to pay for
his time & his outlay of money, if he is a man of
business, without extra copies amounting to as
much as the printing required for the legislation
of Congress - that is, if the printing required
for the legislation should amount to say
\$20,000, there should be \$20,000 worth
of extra numbers. I don't believe that most
persons who are estimating about Congress
printing, take into view at all the amount
which the printer pays, for folding & stitching.

You are no doubt paying at least \$150 a
week for folding & stitching. Should Mr. Niles'
bill pass, your continuing to execute the
public printing will then depend whether
you are most desirous of making money or
making a good character - You cannot, I think,
make both under it. You may make money
under it, if Congress shall give to you the
usual quality & quantity of printing, and you
shall read the proofs once only, & follow copy,
(we used to read them well, twice, & make grammar
of it) print on low price paper, & take your time

to execute the printing. You will find out, if you have not done so already, that the printing which you do at night, or on Sunday, costs the public printer about 50 per cent more than that done in day time in the working days of the week.

No printer ever made any money under the joint resolution of 1819 - or, if they did, they did not keep it - except Mr Blair & myself; and ever since we made money under it, almost every democratic member of Congress seems to think the price was too high.

None know how we made our money - I hardly know myself. I know this much, that we made at least one third of all that we are worth, on one fat job, which we had our own time to do it in.

I mean the census blanks, & tables, of 1840. The prices of printing are now just 20 per cent lower than the prices fixed by the joint resolution of 1819, & 5 per cent lower than we were ever paid for the public printing. They are about one third what they were previously to 1819, that is, printing that cost \$3 previous to 1819, is now printed for \$1. The prices of 1819 were fixed by members of Congress, who were printers. The prices of presswork & paper are lower than they were in 1819, but the wages of workmen are higher than they were then.

If Congress shall ever establish a National Printing Office the members will find, I think, that the public printing will cost at least 50 per cent more than it does now. I have not time to read what I have scratched down. If you can read it you will be able to form something approximating to a correct opinion of what I think now the subject.

Major J P Heap
Washington, D.C.

Respectfully
Signed, John K. Rives

I would also state for your information,
that the printing done for the Senate during the
last three months session of 28th Congress, ex-
clusive of the Patent Office documents, amounted
as I am informed to about \$ 84,000.00
And the printing for the House during
the same session of three months,
exclusive of the Patent Office Doc,
amounted to 61,738.20

Total amount exclusive of the Patent Office Document \$ 145,738.20

Our Act rendered to the Senate,
for printing executed during the
Present Session from Dec to April 1st
four months, amounts to 23,201.80

For the House from Dec^r to March 1st
three months 55,700.00
Total \$ 78,901.80

Showing an excess of the last session
of three months over the present session
of four months. \$ 66,836.40

In our account up to the time specified
above, all the large documents with extra numbers
are included, with the exception of the Patent
Office Doc, which is not yet completed for the Senate

These facts I lay before you for the purpose
of showing the perfect fallacy of the many state-
ments now in circulation, in reference to the
great amount of printing ordered the present session,
and the immense profit of the public printers.

* Our presses have been at work
almost constantly, till mid-night
to meet promptly the urgent
demands upon us.

Very Respectfully
Yr Obedt Servt
John P. Keith

J. P. K.