

006 ALLEN, BENJAMIN – [REV. BENJAMIN ALLEN]

Editor & Publisher

Martinsburg

Publisher of *The Layman's Magazine* (1815-16) at Martinsburg with John Alburtis (004).

Allen was a well-respected circuit minister for Protestant Episcopal Church who used the print trade to advance his ministry with imprints he either edited or wrote, and then published.

A native of New York, Allen made his first appearance in Virginia in late 1814, seeking work as a lay-reader in the northern end of the Shenandoah Valley. Raised a Presbyterian, Allen turned to Episcopalianism instead in 1814 under the tutelage of Richard Channing Moore, later Virginia's supervisory Bishop. On meeting Allen, Bishop William Meade made extensive use of Allen's organizational and oratorical talents as a part of his efforts to rebuild the old Anglican parishes of the Valley into new Episcopal ones. Over the next nine years, Allen helped to identify adherents and form congregations in what had been the Norbonne Parish of Berkeley County; he even built new church buildings in Charlestown and Shepherdstown where he was rector.

As a part of those labors, Allen began a publishing program, like what was then being pursued by rival Presbyterian and Baptists ministers in the Commonwealth. He had already published six volumes of spiritual and patriotic poetry in New York (1811-14) before his travels to Virginia. Now he turned to religious themes, drafting a two-volume history of the American church and an abridged single-volume history of the Reformation. But before those projects saw print, Allen convinced Alburtis to print, on speculation, a new religious monthly, *The Layman's Magazine*, as a way to promote Episcopalian ideals. Their venture lasted just a year (1815-16) before financial pressures brought it to an end – a problem all Virginia-based religious magazines experienced in these years. This episode helped to turn Allen toward the larger publishing firms of Washington and Philadelphia for his subsequent publications.

Moore, Meade, and other church leaders were impressed with Allen's work, despite the burden that a wife and infant children placed on his itinerancy. His growing reputation and visibility resulted in a call to fill the pulpit of St. Paul's Church in Philadelphia in 1823, so abruptly ending his Valley residence. There Allen tried to replicate his Virginia experience, but found strong resistance to his plan to form new churches among the pulpit-holders of the existing ones. His health, a life-long concern, now began to fail under the stress. So with the consent of church leaders, he undertook a journey to England in late 1827 to recover his health. Though this voyage apparently reinforced and reinvigorated his sense of mission, it did not cure him. Allen died on the return trip to Philadelphia in January 1829.

Allen left a wife, Harriet Swift, a native of his hometown, and six minor children at his death. Ever in pecuniary straits, he left them insolvent as well. So the leaders of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America had a lengthy memoir of Allen, crafted by his brother Thomas, published in 1832 to provide for his bereaved family.

Personal Data

Born:	1789	Sept. 29	Hudson, New York
Married:	1812	Aug. 6	Harriet Swift @ Hudson, New York

Died: 1829 Jan. 23 At sea, aboard the brig *Edward*
Children: George (b. 1813), Harriet (b. 1816), John (b. 1817) Mary Ann (b.
1821), Benjamin (b. 1822), Henry (b. 1827).

Sources: Imprints; Meade, *Old Churches*; Allen, *Memoir of Benjamin Allen*.