

008 AMMEN, DAVID

Printer, Publisher, Bookseller

Fincastle, Botetourt

Publisher of first newspaper in Botetourt County, *The Herald of Virginia & Fincastle Weekly Advertiser* (1800-01), a short-lived joint venture with eldest brother John Ammen (009).

David Ammen was the first to establish a press office in Fincastle, apparently just before 1800. Where he learned the trade is unknown, but that choice of employment is consistent with his status as the youngest of the nine children. His family came to Botetourt County in 1786, when its patriarch, Durst, took up a five-hundred-acre grant on Looney's Mill Creek; David was then just eleven-years of age. Though his father's land holdings only increased in subsequent years, David's choice of the printing trade indicates a turn away from farming driven by an unequal division of the family's assets; indeed, the bulk of Durst's real property went to second son Michael on his death in 1805, with the eldest son, John, having already invested heavily in a weaving mill.

It appears that his newspaper venture came in middle of an extended effort at job-printing in this distant part of Virginia. In 1800, the closest press was in Lexington, forty miles down the Valley, making such an office a viable business, if properly managed. Indirect evidence suggests that Ammen maintained such an office from the mid-1790s until about 1807. Yet the *Herald* was published perhaps eighteen months, from early 1800 until summer 1801, an indication of its problematic nature. The timing of his office's closing, coming when his father's estate was settled, suggests that Ammen returned to a farming focus as a result of a paternal legacy. By then, he had married Sarah Houtts and their first son had been born; so he would have then needed a more reliable income.

Yet Ammen could not shed his journalistic inclinations completely. Ten years later, in 1817, he moved his immediate family to Brown County, Ohio, along the Ohio River, just east of Cincinnati. There he established both a sizable farm and a series of new weekly journals: *The Benefactor* (Levanna, 1820), *The Castigator* (Ripley/Georgetown, 1824-27), and the *Democratic Standard* (Georgetown, 1833 on). He had only recently retired from editing the *Standard* when he died, accidentally drowning in the Ohio River near Ripley in September of 1846. His widow eventually moved on into Cincinnati, dying there in 1852.

David Ammen's larger impact on American history, however, came through his sons. His youngest son, Daniel, was a life-long friend of Ulysses S. Grant, having saved the future president from drowning during their childhood in Brown County; he went on to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy, rising to the rank of Admiral in the Union Navy during the Civil War; afterward, he used his position to advocate for a global fleet that could protect American commerce; to that end, he pressed for the construction of a canal across Central America to connect the coasts. David's second son, Jacob, was a military & civil engineer; a West Point graduate, he rose to the rank of General in the Union Army during the Civil War; afterward, he was sent by President Grant to Nicaragua to survey possible routes for the trans-isthmian canal advocated by his brother, the president's close friend. His third son, Col. Michael Napoleon Ammen, might also have made such a noteworthy impact, had he not been murdered in New Orleans in 1837 while stationed with the Army there. None of

his children, however, followed their father into journalism.

Personal Data

Born: Oct. 31 1775 Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.
Married: Sept. 2 1802 Botetourt County, Virginia.
Died: Sept. 1846 near Ripley, Ohio.
Children: Alexander (b. 1804); Jacob (b. 1807); Michael (b. 1808); Daniel (b. 1819); Amanda (b. 1821).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Austin, *Botetourt County Families*; Stoner, *Seed-Bed of the Republic*; death notice, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 Sept. 1846; *ANB* (entry on Daniel); *DAB* (entry on Jacob).

The spelling of his surname varies between Ammen and Amen; in early Virginia records the Amen form prevails, anglicizing a Germanic name; but the family's genealogical accounts, Ammen's later Ohio imprints, and his son's many biographies all embrace the Ammen form; so the style employed here follows that convention.