

029 BELL, EDWARD – [DR. EDWARD BELL]

Editor & Publisher

Shepherdstown

Editor and Publisher of the *Virginia Monitor* (1820-23) at Shepherdstown.

Bell was part of the family then associated with the nearby Hagerstown, Maryland, *Torch Light*; his elder brother, William Duffield Bell, was that paper's publisher, and their younger brother, Samuel Bell (031), worked at the press there. Both Edward and William were identified as physicians in later years, but it seems that, given Edward's relatively young age (then 25), medicine was a profession he embraced subsequent to this journalistic efforts.

The *Virginia Monitor* was Bell's first and only newspaper venture; he began its publication in September 1820. While not a continuation of the previous *Informer*, this paper was almost certainly its descendant. The press office associated with the *Monitor* seems to have been the one established in early 1816 by John Nelson Snider (392) to publish his *American Eagle*. Snider sold that paper to the firm of Maxwell & Harper in early 1817, which became the firm of Robinson & Harper in early 1819; that summer, Robinson & Harper recast the *Eagle* as the *Potomack Register*, just before selling it, once again, to G. W. Sappington & Co., who retitled it *Informer*. Sappington (370), however, quit that firm within a few months, leaving the paper in the hands of one Thomas Trice (418), who was apparently his "& Co." Trice then sold the paper to Bell in August 1820. Such a rapid succession of owners is indicative of any such journal's ongoing financial difficulties, and the appearance of Bell's paper just a month after Trice ceased issuing his suggests that the Hagerstown Bells acquired this nearby journal and press, at a discount, to expand their business reach in the Potomac Valley.

Not surprisingly, the *Monitor* retained the Federalist perspective of its predecessors, just as the Hagerstown *Torch Light* maintained. But nothing else can be said about its content or influence, as the only surviving issues of this journal today come from the summer of 1823, about a year after Bell sold the paper. The only thing that can be said with any certainty is that brother Samuel died while in Edward's employ on September 23, 1821; three days before his death, Nathaniel Mitchell (1796-1884) a Baltimore-trained printer, was reported to have joined the *Monitor's* staff. Mitchell's name adorns the colophon of the surviving 1823 numbers (June 4, July 16, and August 6), leading several authorities to date the start of the *Monitor* to October 23, 1822, based on the volume numbering seen in those few issues. But that date probably marks the beginning of Mitchell's sole ownership of the weekly and his adoption of a new number scheme conforming to his proprietorship. Hence it also marks the date that Bell relinquished control of the *Monitor* and retired from journalism.

Bell and his brothers had come to Hagerstown originally from their family's farm just across the Mason-Dixon line in Franklin County, Pennsylvania; now Bell returned there, ultimately taking up a medical practice in Montgomery Township, immediately north of Hagerstown. He died there in January 1831, barely thirty-five years old, and was conspicuously mourned in the pages of his brother's newspaper for his life's lost potential.

Personal Data

Born: Nov. 18 1795 Chambersburg, Franklin County, Pennsylvania

Died: Jan. 12 1831 Montgomery, Franklin County, Pennsylvania

No spouse or children noted in Bell family records.

Sources: Brigham; Musser, *Shepherdstown*; Scharf, *Western Maryland*.