

### 033 BERRY, JOHN

Printer & Publisher

Wellsburg

Printer and Publisher of the *Wellsburgh Gazette* (1814-36) from 1816 to 1822.

Berry was a peripatetic figure in the printing trade in the early 1800s. His first appearance as a journalist came in 1807 when he founded the *Minerva* in Beavertown, Pennsylvania. At that time he was a member of the town council there, suggesting that he was from that neighborhood and became part of the trade through his involvement in the *Minerva*. That newspaper was printed for him by Joseph Israel, himself a well-travelled journeyman; Berry was recorded simply its editor. But their association apparently gave Berry the trade skills that he needed to produce papers independently in his subsequent situations.

In late 1808, Berry relocated to Brownsville, Pennsylvania, a place of sizeable commercial potential given its setting on the route of the new National Road; there he took control of that town's first paper, the *Brownsville Gazette*, issuing his first number in January 1809. According to local histories, that weekly started in 1807, but its proprietors are unnamed. Berry was identified as the paper's printer throughout 1809, but in December he sold his interest to William Campbell, who published the *Gazette* until its death in late 1810.

Berry's choice may have been driven by the advent of a competing journal, the *Western Repository*, that same month; it may also have been driven by Joseph Israel's concurrent parting from Beavertown to take up a new paper in Marietta, Ohio; either way, Berry is not found again in the bibliographic record until 1813, a period that corresponds to Israel's residence in Ohio; they may both have been in Marietta. It may also be that Berry returned to Beavertown to succeed Israel as a simple job-printer, as one "John Berry" appears in Beaver County's militia rolls during the War of 1812.

Still, the connection of Israel with southwest Ohio, and the end of that association at just the moment Berry printed his next paper in that neighborhood is telling. That title was the *Ohio Federalist*, published by Charles Hammond in St. Clairsville in May 1813. In their eighteen-month-long alliance Berry is identified as the paper's printer and not an owner, an obvious regression from his Brownsville days. So it is not surprising that Berry moved on again in November 1814.

The *Wellsburgh Gazette* is the next title associated with Berry, this time as its publisher. Some historians assert that this was the first journal issued in this Ohio County town, but it was not. That claim belongs to one Samuel Workman (459), a journeyman from Washington County, Pennsylvania, who published the *Charlestown Gazette* there. That title evinces the source of the erroneous designation. The town was founded in 1791 by Charles Prather, who named it after himself; however, there was already a Charlestown in Virginia, the seat of Jefferson County; so this town became Wellsburg in 1816, named after Charles Wells, a recently deceased townsman. Understanding this confusion in names, it is clear that Workman transferred his weekly to Berry at the end of 1815, when the town was still known as Charlestown; Berry issued his *Gazette* from the renamed Wellsburg without an interruption between the two. That transition suggests that Berry was printing Workman's

paper for him at that time, as Workman began publishing the *Charlestown Gazette* at just the moment that Berry left his Ohio situation forty miles to the west. That he did not again publish a paper until 1819 also suggests that he retained an interest in this one until that time.

This situation was evidently the stable one that Berry had sought since his Beavertown days a decade before; he conducted the *Wellsburgh Gazette* until November 1822, just less than seven years' time, his longest tenure anywhere. Wellsburg was also the only locale where he published books – four religious imprints. So when Berry transferred ownership of his *Gazette* to John Gruber (a part of the large printer-family based in Hagerstown, Maryland), such was done with retirement in mind, as Berry disappears from the bibliographic record with that 1822 sale.

The narrative submitted above is one based on chronology and known relationships, so it is as much a hypothesis as it is a report. Berry is an elusive figure whose fragmentary record leaves us to fill in the gaps between documented events. Hence it is also the case that his familial relations, as well as the dates and places of his birth and death, are uncertain.

***No Personal Data yet discovered.***

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Norona & Shetler; Rice, "West Virginia Printers;" Bausmann, *Beaver County Reader, Beaver County Newspapers*; Ellis, *Fayette County*, and AAS printer file.

Brigham's discussion of Workman's paper reflects his confusion between the two Charlestown then part of Virginia's landscape; he was obviously unaware of the existence of the Ohio County one before 1816.