

035 BISHOP, SAMUEL

Publisher & Bookseller

Alexandria

Bookseller and stationer in Alexandria in the years straddling 1800; publisher of popular London titles through the firm of Peter Cottom (107) and John A. Stewart (402).

What little we know of Bishop is tied directly to contemporaneous imprints. He advertised his wares frequently in Alexandria's newspapers between 1799 and 1803. In the earliest advertisements he stressed the stationery side of his business, particularly blank-books and paper – vital tools in this mercantile entrepôt. But from 1800 on, his notices focused on his books, detailing both available titles and subscription solicitations, as well as marketing a range of patent medicines for the Baltimore firm of Lee & Co. as Alexandria's sole agent.

Generally, the books Bishop advertised were new American editions of British imprints, some of recent origin, others of long-standing renown. Each of the two books he published himself falls into one of those categories. In 1802, Bishop published *The Great Importance of a Religious Life Considered* by William Melmoth, a work first issued in the 1740s, with the addition of remarks targeting Thomas Paine's infamous *Age of Reason* (1795). Then in 1803, he published a contemporary treatise on education: *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education* by Elizabeth Hamilton. Both titles were evidently ones that he could not obtain through his regular book-trade connections. From the other titles he advertised, we can see that his acquisitions relied on the cartel of "Philadelphia Company of Printers and Booksellers" that had driven tradesmen like William Prichard (343) of Richmond from that city in the preceding decade. By 1803, though, we can see him branching out beyond Philadelphia, bringing in titles from Boston and New York, as well as items produced by Samuel Harrison Smith in the adjoining national capital.

Still, that broadening of his suppliers was not enough to stave off insolvency; indeed, it may have accelerated his decline. In June 1803, Bishop assigned his patent-medicine agency to James Kennedy, Sr. (251), another Alexandria bookseller and stationer, admitting that his business was foundering. Thereafter, he no longer advertised in the city's papers, though he was still evidently in business that August when his "book shop" was host for a smallpox-vaccination clinic. But that brief notice is the last time that he is seen in the town's imprint record. The next summer, Alexandria's postmaster advertised that Bishop had unclaimed letters at the post office, indicating that he had departed Alexandria for parts unknown.

Even as Bishop developed a specialized bookselling business in order to compete with the larger ones in Alexandria – such as Cottom & Stewart and J. & J.D Westcott – such a plan did not guarantee his success. After five years there, Bishop simply vanishes from our view.

No Personal Data yet discovered

Sources: Imprints; *Artisans & Merchants*; Alexandria newspaper advertisements, 1799-1804.