

**037 BOGAN, BENJAMIN LEWIS**

**Printer & Publisher**

**Alexandria, Woodstock**

Publisher of the *Woodstock Herald* (1817-23) in Shenandoah County with county-clerk Philip Williams (446) as his partner; previously, he operated a job-printing office in Alexandria.

Bogan was a practical printer, though where he gained his training is unknown. It evidently came after he reached adulthood. Born into a fairly well-off Spotsylvania County family, he attended the College of William and Mary until the start of the War of 1812; he enlisted and presumably served with distinction, as he mustered out at the rank of Major. At war's end, he settled in Alexandria where he learned the printing trade while employed by John A. Stewart (402), a major bookseller and publisher there, once partner to Peter Cottom (107), in the well-known firm of Cottom & Stewart. In July 1816, Bogan established a small printing office in Alexandria, probably serving as Stewart's job-press, given their prior relationship.

Bogan was so employed when he was asked by Philip Williams to come to Woodstock to discuss relocating his new press office to Shenandoah County. Williams was a distinctive figure in the Shenandoah Valley; he was a nephew of one county-court clerk and the father of another; the three men served successively for seventy-eight years as the clerk of Shenandoah County, with Philip serving for fifty-six of them. By 1817, he was manifestly aware of the fact that Woodstock, the county seat, needed a newspaper to provide for legal notices and local advertising. For too long, this market town depended on Winchester's newspapers for such, papers that were increasingly challenged by the growth of population and commerce in the northern valley. Williams wanted to provide a central valley option; all he needed was a trained printer to produce the paper for him.

Bogan travelled to Woodstock sometime in early/mid 1817 as part of the clerk's search for a printer. What he then saw there convinced him to relocate his press to Shenandoah County. Together, the pair issued the first number of the weekly *Woodstock Herald* that December. The new weekly was clearly an immediate success, confirming the partners' assessment of its potential viability. Its success is also evinced by Bogan's ability to buy Williams out of the business at the end of the *Herald's* first six months of publication. With issue of July 1, 1818, Bogan became sole proprietor of the weekly, and remained such until June 1823.

Over the course of those ensuing four years, Bogan forged extensive personal and business links to this Valley town. In June 1819, he married Sarah Ott (1801-67), a daughter Michael Ott (1772-1849), a sizable merchant-planter from a family of early Shenandoah County settlers; that union made Woodstock a significant part of his life from then on, especially as the first six of his ten children were born there. Bogan now joined other members of the Ott clan in non-publishing ventures. In November 1822, he used the proceeds realized from the *Herald* to combine with John D. Ott (1802-70), his wife's brother, and Mathias Zehring, Jr., her cousin, to purchase "the entire stock of Goods of Mr. Michael Ott and Mr. Abraham H. Hoffman's" as the firm of Mathias Zehring & Co.; two years later, Bogan and Ott bought the interest of their kinsman-partner in this dry-goods concern. From 1823 on, Bogan also was involved in his father-in-law's dealings in land and town lots, eventually owning three 1/2

acre lots in Woodstock proper, as well as a farm in neighboring Hardy County.

In October 1822, as he began to pursue these ventures, Bogan offered to sell his weekly; but he evidently failed to find a suitable buyer. So at the end of the ensuing May, he rented his paper and office to James H. Smoot (1799-1841), a young lawyer in the county. He then mortgaged the property involved to John A. Stewart, his old mentor, and William Johnston, husband of a sister of Bogan's wife and the town's postmaster, to infuse all of his business interests with new capital. Following the death of Johnston's wife, the mortgage was sold in late 1830 to Samuel H. Davis (126), the publisher of the *Winchester Republican* and a close friend of Bogan's from his Alexandria days. Some histories of Woodstock report this transfer of Bogan's mortgage as a transfer of the ownership of his newspaper; rather, it was simply a restructuring of his indebtedness with the help of friends and family, while he retained an interest in the weekly until late 1834.

In pursuing this course, Bogan was apparently planning on retiring to a farming life near Woodstock; and for two years that was the case. Smoot's tenure as proprietor of the paper was problematic, however. First, he was required to employ a printer who expected a share of the weekly's profits, so reducing Smoot's income; that printer was Jonathan Foster (1803-24), apparently a son of the like-named founder of Davis's *Winchester Republican*; so when Foster suddenly died in October 1824, Smoot was forced to reorganize his finances. This process was complicated by the fact that Smoot was then supporting the presidential candidacy of John Adams rather than that of Andrew Jackson, the favorite of most county freeholders. These circumstances obliged Bogan to resume sole ownership of the weekly to save the paper when Smoot was unable to settle his debts the following July.

Relieved of the fiscal obligations that had burdened him before July 1825, Smoot began soliciting subscriptions for a new Woodstock weekly to be called the *Sentinel of the Valley*; but by the end of October, Bogan and his kinsmen had brought an end to that project; with the issue of the *Herald* published November 5, 1825, Bogan gave the weekly the title of Smoot's proposed competitor and folded his subscriber list into that of the older sheet. The price of the absorption was apparently a minority interest in relabeled paper; yet by March 1826, Smoot had left Woodstock to attempt another weekly in Salisbury, North Carolina.

These 1825 reorganizations placed the recast weekly even more deeply into the hands of the Bogan-Ott family. The business was now conducted under the corporate name of Ott & Bogan; brother-in-law J. D. Ott became lead proprietor, while his cousin, Samuel Ott (1793-1868), served as its editor. Bogan now divided his energies between his many business interests, and finally divorced himself from this Woodstock weekly in late 1834. The familial concern sold their paper and press to James H. Darlington (1804-79), the former publisher of the *Baptist Monitor and Political Compiler* in Bloomfield, Kentucky. The sale allowed him to finally discharge the mortgage now held by S. H. Davis, who used the proceeds to acquire the *Wheeling Gazette*, in combination with those gained from a sale of his remaining interest in the *Winchester Republican*.

By that time, though, Bogan had already relocated his still-growing family to the District of Columbia, evidently in late 1830. There he became a "general agent," a surrogate for buyers and sellers of property and land there, replicating his Shenandoah real-estate business.

Over the next thirty years Bogan operated this business from bases in both Washington and neighboring Montgomery County, Maryland, though evidently preferring the protection of the city during the Civil War. At war's end, he and wife Sarah bought a farm in Fairfax County outside of Alexandria, where both of them would die: she in 1867, he in 1870. They left a legacy of broad familial interconnections that spread west into the Great Plains and beyond.

***Personal Data***

Born: Dec. 30 1795 Spotsylvania County, Virginia  
Married: June 19 1819 Sarah Ott @ Woodstock, Shenandoah Cty, Va.  
Died: July 25 1870 Fairfax County, Virginia  
Children: John Stewart (b. 1820), Charles Jacob (b. 1820), Benjamin Franklin (b. 1823), Anna Rebecca (b. 1827), Martin Van Buren (b. 1829), Henry Michael (b. 1831), Susan Simpson (b. 1834), Samuel William (b. 1841), Joseph Lacy (b. 1842), John (b. 1845)

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Cappon; *Artisans & Merchants*; Johnston, *Old Virginia Clerks*; Wayland, *Shenandoah County*, *National Intelligencer* advertisements, 1839-60; genealogical data from Bogan family charts posted on Ancestry.com (August 2012).