

## 049 BRANSFORD, ROBERT MOSBY

Printer & Publisher

Richmond, Lynchburg

Publisher of the first newspaper in Lynchburg – the *Union Gazette*, later the *Lynchburg and Farmer's Gazette* (1793-96) – and Richmond journeyman; also cousin of Samuel Bransford (050), a later Lynchburg publisher, and of John Warrock (430), the noted almanac publisher.

Born in 1770, Bransford was son of a wealthy Powhatan County planter, James Bransford, and was educated in Richmond, as were his brothers and cousins. That schooling followed a precedent established by their immigrant grandfather, John Bransford, when he settled in Chesterfield County; the patriarch was granted town lots in Richmond by William Byrd II in 1742, and he built a house there in the 1760s that facilitated this process. So the young Robert was close by when the state government moved to the falls of the James in early 1780; he was also close by the three printing offices that soon appeared there. By 1790, when he reached twenty, he had completed his education and was working in one of those offices; from later associations, it is likely that Bransford was trained in that of John Dixon (140), formerly of Williamsburg. But Dixon's death in May 1791, which reshaped the staff of every Richmond press, put him on an independent path.

In late 1792, Bransford set out on his own; he acquired a press and moved to the newly-chartered market-town of Lynchburg, northwest of his childhood home in Powhatan, south of the new Buckingham plantations of his uncles. Originally a simple ferry landing, owned by the notorious Charles Lynch, this James River village was then fast becoming a key transshipment point in the Virginia piedmont. As such, it would need a mercantile advertiser, and Bransford endeavored to provide one. His new *Union Gazette* apparently began in February 1793, based on the numbering of the few surviving issues. At the end of his first volume, Bransford changed its title to the *Lynchburg and Farmer's Gazette*, apparently to make his journal more identifiable with the locality and its connected interests. However, the paper lived for just three years, until the winter of 1795-96. By late March 1796, Bransford was advertising the sale of his press in Richmond's newspapers, suggesting that the venture was a victim of unpaid subscriptions and overdue debts, as were many journals in the 1790s, and that his creditors were pressing for restitution. That September, his office was sold by his creditors in an auction sale at Wyatt Powell's tavern in Lynchburg.

By then Bransford had returned to work in Richmond as a journeyman, evidently in the employ of John Dixon, Jr. (141). The son had been unable to sustain his father's *Richmond Chronicle* at its former levels, so he finally closed it in August 1796, clearly intent on issuing a new journal better fitting his own views. *The Observatory or A View of the Times* issued its first number a year later, with Bransford playing a key role in its production. However, the journeyman died unexpectedly in July 1798, leaving Dixon to face another reorganization. Within months, he had sold it paper to Meriwether Jones (242), who turned it into the journalistic voice of Virginia's Jeffersonians.

The timing of Bransford's death was tragic on several levels. First, the journal that followed his failed one – *The Lynchburg Gazette* – was then in suspension and up for sale. He may have been planning a return to Lynchburg; as he was just twenty-eight when he died, it is

more than likely that he wanted another chance at journalistic success. Then there was his evident consideration of his future; in 1793, he had married Rachel Courtney, the daughter of the Rev. John Courtney, the influential pastor of Richmond's First Baptist Church, who later would help launch the American Colonization Society; she was also a sister to John Courtney, Jr. (109), then an apprentice printer, who became a notable religious publisher. Thus Bransford was related, either by blood or marriage, to three equals who lived to see sizeable success in Virginia's printing trade in the first decades of the nineteenth century; this pioneering kinsman, however, would be the only one who would not attain the same.

***Personal Data***

Born:	In	1770	Buckingham County, Virginia
Married:	Apr. 13	1793	Rachel Courtney @ Henrico County, Virginia
Died:	July 28	1798	Richmond, Henrico County, Virginia
Children:	One son: Robert Mosby Bransford, Jr.		

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Hubbard on Richmond; Woodson, *Woodsons and Connections*.