

050 BRANSFORD, SAMUEL

Publisher

Lynchburg

Publisher of *The Lynchburg Press* (1815-17) with Jacob Haas (196); also the cousin of Robert Mosby Bransford (049), an earlier Lynchburg publisher, and John Warrock (430), the noted Richmond almanac publisher.

Bransford was the grandson of the English immigrant John Bransford; his father, also John, was born in England, coming to Virginia with the grandfather at seventeen. He eventually purchased plantation in Chesterfield County where Samuel was born in 1778, before he finally settled in Buckingham County. His son was educated in Cartersville in Cumberland County, deviating from the family tradition of schooling in Richmond, but soon thereafter Samuel set out for the state capital and a career in its mercantile trade. That choice brought Bransford to Lynchburg and its thriving commerce in 1815. As part of his business ventures there, he bought into the town's established mercantile advertiser, *The Lynchburg Press*, in about October of that year.

Unlike the earlier experience of his older cousin, Robert, in Lynchburg, this paper was not a novelty; the *Press* was then a thriving six-year-old publication. It had already survived two ownership changes, and was now in the hands of Jacob Haas, an experienced practical printer. During the eight years he retained control of the paper, Haas would engage a series of financial partners; Bransford was his second such partner. He also employed a talented and popular editor for his journal, Samuel Kennedy Jennings (236), the Methodist minister and physician. Bransford apparently saw the entire package – printer, editor, and subscriber list – as a lucrative investment; he remained Haas's partner for two years.

In October 1817, Bransford sold his interest in the *Press* to Samuel Gaines Dawson (131), a neighbor and relation of Haas, and moved on to other investments. Jennings also moved on at about this time, focusing first on a new Methodist parish in Lynchburg, before eventually landing in Baltimore to take over the presidency of a medical college there. Both departures unsettled the stability of the journal, and the Haas & Dawson concern sold their declining business eighteen-months later to a local brewer, William Duffy (150), who quickly sold it, in turn, to the local political backers of the soon-to-be governor, James Pleasants, making his son, John Hampden Pleasants (330), its new editor.

Bransford remained an important presence in Lynchburg over the next twenty years. His business investments in this James River entrepôt continued to be profitable, supporting a comfortable existence; indeed, the 1820 census shows that the family owned fourteen slaves – a large number for any urban locale. With the Rev. Samuel Kennedy Jennings (236), Bransford assisted in building-up the Methodist church in Lynchburg, and helped it continue to grow after Jennings's left the town in 1815. Meanwhile, his neighbors turned to him for civic leadership. By the mid-1820s, he had been named the Sergeant of the Corporation, effectively the town constable, a post he held for the rest of his life. One contemporary noted that Bransford was the fitting choice: "Though not of large stature, his presence had a magical effect in dispelling a mob; and there was something in the very expression of his eye, which caused even the most rebellious to submit." At the state level, he served as a

manager of the Virginia Colonization Society alongside John Marshall, James Madison, James Monroe, and John Tyler. Thus, when he died in 1837, Virginia mourned his passing, not just Lynchburg.

Personal Data

Born: Aug. 4 1778 King William, Chesterfield County, Virginia.
Married: In 1808 Phoebe Walton @ Lynchburg, Virginia.
Died: Nov. 3 1837 Lynchburg, Campbell County, Virginia.
Children: Thomas Alfred (b. 1809), Phoebe Ann (b. 1812), Judith Amonette (b. 1813), Samuel Jennings (b. 1814), John William (b. 1826).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Cabell, *Sketches of Lynchburg*; Woodson, *Woodsons and Connections*.