

051 BREND, THOMAS

Bookbinder & Stationer

Williamsburg, Richmond

A bookbinder in Williamsburg (1766-83) who joined Archibald Currie (113) in Richmond (1783-99) to form the bindery firm of Brend & Currie.

Direct evidence of Brend's origin is wanting, but anecdotal sources suggest that he was an English immigrant who landed in Maryland in the 1760s; there he found work, and possibly his training, as a binder in the Annapolis press office of Jonas Green. Sometime after 1770, Brend left Green for an independent situation in Williamsburg, a place that then supported two press offices and at least two book shops. By 1779, he was operating a bindery at the former Brick House Tavern (at the SW corner of Duke of Gloucester and Botetourt streets), then a tenement equidistant from those two presses. His small workshop may have been as a result of a legacy left to him by his close friend Henry Bowcock (044), a practical printer in Williamsburg who had died that February.

Remarkably, Brend remained in Williamsburg until about 1783. Most other print-tradesmen there joined in the relocation of the government to Richmond in early 1780; but Brend stayed on, likely as a result of an association with the office of John Clarkson (093) and Augustine Davis (119), who had inherited the press of Alexander Purdie (345) in April 1779. Clarkson & Davis had claimed a financial inability to relocate at that time, and continued in Williamsburg until 1783; their business was saved – despite the loss of its main customer base – by the arrival of French troops in late summer of 1781, forces associated with the siege of nearby Yorktown; they remained encamped on the lower peninsula until the Treaty of Paris was promulgated in 1783, and this one Williamsburg press provided for their job-printing needs. Thus, it seems likely that Brend also provided bindery services for them.

Still, Brend did eventually relocate to Richmond in 1783. There he formed a partnership with Archibald Currie, evidently as a way to enlarge both men's fortunes. Apparently, Currie had worked in Williamsburg before 1780 as well; if so, his employers were probably John Dixon (140) and Thomas Nicolson (315), who had split up in late 1780 with each founding a separate press in Richmond. Brend's arrival there allowed the two binders to establish a business that served all of the capital's printing establishments without being tied to any one of them; their alliance would continue until Brend's death in December 1799, a clear indication of the firm's success.

The Brend & Currie workshop was Richmond's first real step toward the modernized form of publishing then developing in Philadelphia. The publisher of any imprint could now assign each element of its production – from editorial, to press work, to binding – to a series of contracted vendors, and not to an all-encompassing printing office, as had been the case in Williamsburg before the Revolution. From the mid-1780s on, Richmond's presses now relied on binderies like Brend & Currie's to complete publications. This is evident in the records of the publication of a complete set of Virginia's laws in 1795; Augustine Davis owned one of three presses working on the project, all of whom sent their finished sheets to Brend & Currie for binding. When Davis, then the public printer, failed to provide a needed advance payment, for necessary supplies, they petitioned Governor James Wood to intervene; he

provided the advance, and took it out of Davis's compensation. Davis would eventually pay them for their services, minus the contested advance.

Brend became, in short order, a "respectable inhabitant" of Richmond through his industry. In 1786, he even married a daughter of Williamsburg who he had long known. The following year established his business in a shop close to the Market House, one of Richmond's more visible venues. But in late 1799, he developed a "lingering indisposition" which took his life on December 21st. Almost immediately, Currie formed a new partnership with John Pumfrey (344), an indication of just how large their business had become: the surviving partner could not handle it alone. Brend would be sorely missed.

Personal Data

Born:	???	England?
Married:	June 20 1786	Elizabeth Ratcliffe @ Williamsburg, Virginia.
Died:	Dec. 21 1799	Richmond, Virginia.

Sources: Imprints; MEDSA Index; York County Project Files for Brend & Bowcock, and "Brick House Tavern Historical Report," CWF; advertisements in Williamsburg (1780) and Richmond (1783-99) newspapers; Samford & Hemphill, *Bookbinder in Williamsburg*; Stoutamire, *Music of Old South*; Ward & Greer, *Richmond during Revolution*.