

055 BROUGHTON, THOMAS G. – [THOMAS GREENE BROUGHTON, SR.]

Printer & Publisher

Norfolk

Publisher of *Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald*, first as a hand in the office of James O'Connor (317), then as O'Connor's partner (1817-19), and finally its proprietor (1819-61).

Broughton was a native Virginian brought into the printing trade by an English immigrant. He was born in Princess Anne County, known today as Virginia Beach. His father, Charles, was a substantial landowner there until his death in 1805; his passing came at about the moment that Thomas began his association with James O'Connor.

Some accounts suggest that Broughton first entered O'Connor's employ as the *Herald's* editor three years later – accounts based on notices of his marriage in 1808 which reported his occupation. But he apparently became a part of the *Herald* office at the end of 1804 when O'Connor lost his long-term partner and friend, Charles Willett (445), to ill-health and retirement; Broughton seems to have been a player in the subsequent reorganization of the office, and it was his work in those intervening years that induced the editorial assignment. Over the following years, O'Connor increasingly delegated the supervision of his office and journal to Broughton, especially after the War of 1812, when his health began to decline. In early 1817, he made Broughton an equal partner in his business.

O'Connor's largess proved a controversial act when he died in July 1819. The *Herald's* new cross-town rival, the non-partisan advertiser, the *American Beacon*, reprinted Broughton's lengthy memorial of his partner's life in full, adding a preface evincing the general sense of loss in Norfolk on his passing:

"A residence of long-standing, a pursuit which made him generally known, and an urbanity of manners which can ciliated popular favor, which caused the death of Mr. O'Connor to be long regarded as a serious loss for our society. He possessed an eminent degree of characteristic benevolence of his countrymen, and his hand was ever ready to dispense to the sons and daughters of affliction that solace which their various distresses required. Faithful and zealous in the discharge of his duties as a public Journalist, he continued to the latest hour of his existence, firmly devoted to the principles which he had early espoused, and in support of which he had long braved the fury of governmental persecution in his native country, from which he finally took refuge in this asylum of liberty."

But the tributes quickly passed. Following the issue of July 16, 1819, not quite two weeks after O'Connor's death, his nephew and administrator of his estate, Patrick Corrigan, seized control of the premises of the *Herald* with a group of armed men. The family believed that they owned the *Herald*, and not the "junior editor" who had possessed O'Connor's "entire confidence [from] full communion" with his late partner. Legally, they were wrong, but that did not stop them from taking control of the office with a party of armed men and prevent Broughton from using it. On July 20th, Broughton wrote to the editors of the primary mercantile advertisers in the major port cities along the eastern seaboard explaining the reasons for the involuntary suspension of the *Herald*, asking them to publish his letter as a

notice of his intention to regain control of the office in the courts.

"The suspension of the Herald, has doubtless been a subject of surprise to you as well as a pain to myself ... it has certainly not been owing to any fault of mine, but solely to the rash and illegal act of a man who ought to have been the last in the world to become an enemy of the paper. In a few words, Mr. Patrick Corrigan ... has tho't proper to make an entry into that office, and still holds possession with force of arms. His conduct, however, will soon be brought before proper authority, and doubtless receive the reward it deserves ... In the meantime, this suspension I hope will be of short continuance, and at any rate, will not be very long. I am already making arrangements to renew publication of the Herald in a few days, or a few weeks at furthest. The partnership of our late firm having been dissolved by the death of my partner, it is my intention ... [to continue] the paper in my own name. This is a right which the law of my country gives me, and which I shall neither yield to violence, nor, I trust, forfeit to misconduct."

The next day, Corrigan countered with an advertisement in Norfolk's *American Beacon* that offered the *Herald* office for sale; the editors evidently told Broughton of Corrigan's plans before his notice appeared, giving Broughton the chance to place a notice directly under Corrigan's warning that he would use the courts to recover anything Corrigan sold illegally.

Within a week of Corrigan's raid, Broughton had regained physical control of the office after having Corrigan arrested for a breach of the peace. But by then he had already ordered a complete press office to replace the seized one; so Broughton now used the unexpected hiatus to recast the *Herald*, as well as reorganize a business of which he was now the sole owner. That press arrived in Norfolk on August 16th, and Broughton resumed publication on August 23rd. That same day, he issued a new country edition on a twice-weekly pace, a demonstration of the reorganized office's increased capacity.

The *Genius of Liberty* in Leesburg was particularly impressed with the result:

"*The Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald* has arisen like the Phoenix, from the ashes of the old, in a new form, in a new dress, with new strength, with new vigor. — Its publication had been suspended in consequence of some difficulties arising between *Mr. Broughton* and the heirs of *Mr. O'Connor*, formerly partners in the establishment. The paper is now continued by *Mr. Broughton* in a much improved and enlarged form. *Mr. B* says 'A period of 40 days has elapsed since the last publication of the Herald — the period of a regular quarantine. I trust it is now not only rid of its *plague*, but that it will give satisfactory evidence to the public of the soundness and vigor of its constitution.'"

And indeed, Broughton was soon rid of the "plague." In February 1820, the Norfolk Borough Hustings Court released Corrigan from a bond guaranteeing his appearance to answer "for a breach of the peace at the instance of Thomas G. Broughton." The release shows that a settlement had been reached between the parties, though certainly not one to Corrigan's liking; he was also ordered to pay all legal costs associated with the affair, signifying that the court judged him to be the party at fault here. In March, Broughton placed a notice in the *Beacon* offering "All the Printing Materials belonging to the late concern of O'Connor and

Broughton" for sale; at the end of that notice, Corrigan offered for sale a much smaller set of shop-worn tools "belonging to the estate of James O'Connor, deceased." With that sale, the O'Connor family's connections to the Virginia print trade came to an end. Broughton, however, continued to conduct the *Herald* until a week or so before his death in 1861. He was assisted in the effort from the 1830s onward by at least two of his six sons, Thomas Gibson Broughton (1813-66) and Richard Gatewood Broughton (1820-68). Thereafter, the *Herald* adopted a Whig perspective, one that saw nationalistic policies, and not sectional ones, as central to the port-city's future growth and development. Such a view made the *Herald* ever more pro-Union as the Civil War dawned; it also evidently limited its circulation in the secessionist tidewater, especially with the journal's support of the Constitutional Union candidate, John Bell, in the 1860 election. In the end, Broughton's death, a shortage of paper, and the federal blockade of the port in 1861 combined to slay the *Norfolk Herald*.

After the 1819 transition and suit, Broughton became a prominent figure in Norfolk's civic life, as well as in its commercial one. He served on the common council, led various civic committees, and was an elder in Norfolk's Presbyterian church. His family was omnipresent in the port, having grown to twelve children (six sons and six daughters), who then married into other prominent families there. Hence, his passing in 1861 was seen throughout the community as the end of an era – especially in light of then current, divisive events.

Personal Data

Born: Sept. 27 1786 Princess Anne County, Virginia.
Married: May 16 1808 Ann Bell @ Norfolk, Virginia.
Died: Aug. 24 1861 Norfolk, Virginia.
Children: Emily C. (b. 1809), Ann E. (b. 1812), Thomas Greene Jr. (b. 1813),
Ann B. (b. 1815), Charles H. (b. 1817), William H. (b. 1819),
Richard G. (b. 1821), Robert (b. 1823), Eliza B. (b. 1825), Helen
F. (b. 1827), Laura B. (b. 1829), John (b. 1834).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Rawson, "Guardians," chap. 6; O'Connor obituary and subsequent family/partner litigation from Norfolk's *American Beacon* (7/1819-1/1818).