

**056 BROWN, JOHN**

**Publisher**

**Norfolk**

Second publisher of *The Virginia Gazette or Norfolk Intelligencer* (1775), the first newspaper in Virginia issued outside of Williamsburg.

John Brown is truly an enigmatic figure, largely from the commonality of his name. This Brown was evidently a Scottish immigrant, who was an import-export merchant in Norfolk in 1774; whether his residence was intended as a permanent relocation or a temporary assignment has never been determined. What is well known is his open resistance to the Continental Association of October 1774 and the consequences of his noncompliance.

By 1774, the port of Norfolk had grown to the point that the three weekly newspapers then published in Williamsburg, the only journals in the colony, could not supply the demand for advertising that sustained the port's commerce. So William Duncan (454), a Scottish factor, brought the press of Robert Gilmour (179) and two journeymen – Alexander Cameron (076) and Donald McDonald (286) – to Norfolk to produce a new paper that could accommodate that demand. His *Virginia Gazette or Norfolk Intelligencer* appeared in June 1774 under the proprietorship of William Duncan & Co. He continued publishing until about January 1775 when political events caught up with him.

As a Scotsman directing a printing office full of Scottish tradesmen, he was watched by the Norfolk committee enforcing the Continental Association. His activities skirted the letter of the pact and so Duncan was ostracized by the community in January. That decision mandated that all Virginians boycott his newspaper; so Duncan handed it off to John Brown, with Gilmour, Cameron, and MacDonald printing the journal "for the proprietors."

John Brown experienced a similar fate just two months later. On March 2nd, a merchant ship arrived from Jamaica carrying slaves destined for sale at Brown's warehouse. News of this apparent violation of the Association mandate spread quickly, bringing an immediate investigation and a speedy condemnation. On March 6th, he too was ostracized by Norfolk's vigilance committee, and the paper's existence was again threatened. In short order, Brown was pressured to sell his interest in the *Intelligencer* to an owner more attuned to the cause of the colonists, not that of the crown. Sometime in April, he sold the paper to John Hunter Holt & Co. Holt (223) was the son and partner of New York's patriot printer, John Holt (222), as well as a nephew of Virginia's late public-printer, William Hunter (230).

Brown apparently remained in Virginia for the duration of the Revolutionary War; but like many Loyalists, he left Virginia with Lord Cornwallis after the British surrender at Yorktown in 1781. His further fate is shrouded by his less-than-unique name.

***No Personal Data yet discovered.***

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Van Schreeven, *Revolutionary Virginia*.