

059 BRYAN, DANIEL

Author & Publisher

Harrisonburg, Richmond

Publisher of the first secular books issued in Harrisonburg, the first through the press of Andrew B. Davidson (116) and George Bourne (043) in 1813, the second from that of Laurentz Wartmann (431) in 1815.

Bryan was a native of Rockingham County, son of Major William P. Bryan, a militia leader on the Virginia frontier during the Revolutionary War. He was schooled locally, most notably at Lexington's Washington Academy (today Washington & Lee University). Yet his original occupation – the law – was something he trained for after leaving Lexington. By 1813, Bryan was a practicing lawyer in the Rockingham and Shenandoah county courts.

Bryan's legal practice in Harrisonburg brought him an acquaintance with the Presbyterian ministers Andrew B. Davidson and George Bourne. They had just opened their Theological Printing Office there to produce cheap religious tracts both for their ministries and for their newly-established Virginia Tract Society. But as such tracts were usually distributed without charge, the pair also needed to sell secular imprints whose profits would support their larger evangelical mission. Bryan provided them such an opportunity.

The lawyer had developed a poetical side and, with willing publishers close at hand, he offered Davidson & Bourne for publication a long heroic poem centered on Daniel Boone and Euro-American settlement of Kentucky. *The Mountain Muse* issued from their budding press in 1813, proving to be the first of six literary works that he published in his lifetime. Following the collapse of the Davidson & Bourne office in the summer of 1814, their shop foreman, Lawrence Wartmann, remained in Harrisonburg to conduct job printing. In late 1815, Wartmann issued Bryan's second effort, an oration on the education of women that he had delivered earlier that year. Both works were apparently financed by Bryan himself, or by his friends, as each recorded that they were printed for Bryan, the formal publisher. While both were successful, it would be another decade before Bryan published again.

After the death of his first wife in 1816, he remarried; Mary Thomas Barbour was sister to two of the state's leading Jeffersonians – Philip Pendleton Barbour and James Barbour of nearby Orange County. Between that marital connection, his legal practice, and his poetic oratory, Bryan became a viable political candidate in this part of the Valley. Remarkably, he was elected in 1818 to the Virginia Senate. However, he also brought that course to a quick end by speaking against the admission of Missouri as slave state in 1819, advocating the gradual emancipation for all slaves in the country instead – possibly influenced by George Bourne, who had been forced from Rockingham County in 1815 for his strident abolitionist views. That principled stand was a sword that cut two ways; first it brought Bryan an appointment as postmaster at Alexandria in 1821; but it also cost him his seat in the state senate. Some historians suggest that his brothers-in-law brought about his unseating as an act of party discipline; but it is also likely that his acceptance of a federal post disqualified him for state office, as was the standard practice for that time. Still, he plainly accepted this turn of fate, continuing as Alexandria's postmaster until 1853.

Bryan continued to write and lecture, even as he directed the key element of the postal service in northern Virginia. Three more "poetical addresses" appeared in print by 1841, as well as a collection of the poems delivered throughout the country on the occasion of the Marquis de Lafayette's farewell tour in 1824-25. For each of these works, he employed a different printer in four different locales: Philadelphia (1826), Washington (1826), Richmond (1830), and Alexandria (1841). In his Richmond association, the printer he chose was one Thomas Willis White (442), soon-to-be publisher of the *Southern Literary Messenger*; Bryan likely already knew White from his Senate days, as White became printer to the Senate just a year before Bryan was elected to that body. It is also noteworthy that Bryan corresponded with Edgar Allan Poe, soon-to-be editor of White's monthly magazine and one nineteenth-century literary figure who openly approved of Bryan's work.

As Bryan neared sixty, he resigned his postal commission in 1853 to become librarian for the Treasury Department's library, a less energetic role for the aging poet. He remained loyal to the Union in 1861, and lived in Alexandria throughout the Civil War. At war's end, he moved into a house in Washington proper, where he died in December 1866, by then largely forgotten by new generations of readers.

Personal Data

Born:	In	1795	Rockingham County, Virginia
Married [1]:	Oct. 5	1815	Rebecca Davenport @ Harrisonburg (d. 1816)
Married [2]:	April 8	1818	Mary Thomas Barbour @ Harrisonburg, Va.
Died:	Dec. 22	1866	Washington, District of Columbia.
Children:	Thomas Barbour Bryan (1828-1906)		

Sources: Imprints; Wayland, *Historic Harrisonburg*; *Poets of Virginia*; federal decennial censuses for 1830 to 1860; genealogical data from family charts posted on Ancestry.com (August 2012).