

069 BUTLER, JOSEPH

Publisher & Proprietor

Staunton

Publisher of *The Observer* (1814) in Staunton in partnership with Philip DuVal (155); also of the *Lynchburg Press* (1822) and Lynchburg's *Virginian* (1822-23), and of the *Constitutional Whig* (1824) at Richmond, all with John Hampden Pleasants (330).

Little definitive can be said about Joseph Butler, but associations are clearly suggested by those seen in his business circle, whose central figure is John Hampden Pleasants.

Butler was a last minute addition to the plan of Philip DuVal to publish a Republican weekly in Staunton – the heart of "Old Federal Augusta" County. DuVal was a Richmond-based publisher who employed Gerard Banks (019) as his editor in this venture; thus Butler was likely the tradesman behind *The Observer*, especially as DuVal had first advertised the journal as a production of Philip DuVal & Co., indicating he had intended to offer a minority interest to a trained printer from the start.

The existence of the *Observer* was brief, just three weeks in August 1814. It was apparently abandoned for a number of reasons. First, British forces invaded Maryland and then marched on Washington just as the *Observer* began publication; this invasion triggered militia call-ups throughout the state, with several Virginia newspapers going into suspension from the resulting loss of their skilled tradesmen. Secondly, news of the impending death of Samuel Pleasants (331), the venerable Republican publisher in Richmond, began to spread within the print-trade at that same time; DuVal would be an important part of the dispersal of his estate in Richmond later that year. And lastly, Staunton supported a stable Federalist journal – the ironically titled *Republican Farmer* -- which had already repelled four prior Jeffersonian challengers, most recently in 1813. Hence, a quick death was obviously best.

Butler's next appearance is in 1822 as partner to John Hampden Pleasants in the *Lynchburg Press*. He helped the young editor to buy the town's other paper that year, combine the two into their new *Virginian*; the merger provided James Pleasants, the editor's father, an outlet for his political views, independent of the main party organ, the *Richmond Enquirer*, just as he became governor. The pair then sold the *Virginian* to Richard H. Toler and moved to Richmond to launch the *Constitutional Whig* there in January 1824. DuVal played a role in the switch, following Butler as Pleasants' partner in late 1824, allowing Butler's retirement.

The familial linkages here are indicative of Butler's identity. DuVal's niece was married to Richard Toler, while Pleasants' sister wed Marcellus Smith, his once and future partner. That Smith family had marital connections to the Joseph Butler family of Dinwiddie County, which included a scion named Joseph. All four families were noted Jeffersonian supporters in that region, meaning that they travelled in the same regional social circles, as evinced by the marriages. Moreover, the younger Joseph was only slightly older than the more-visible John Hampden Pleasants. The 1830 death of that Joseph Butler is consistent with a need to retire in late 1824 to attend to family affairs, a leave-taking that brought his old partner DuVal back into this politically-motivated journalistic circle.

Personal Data (suggested)

Born: 1787 Nov. 19 Gravelly Run, Dinwiddie County, Virginia
Married: 1808 Oct. 15 Charlotte Binford @ Dinwiddie County, Va.
Died: 1830 Apr. 14 Gravelly Run, Dinwiddie County, Virginia
Children: Gulielma (b. 1809), Oliver (b. 1811), Benjamin (n. 1813), Joseph
(b. 1817), Edna (b. 1820), Joseph (b. 1823).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Cappon; Hubbard on Richmond; Cabell, *Sketches of Lynchburg*; genealogical data from Pleasants, Smith, Toler, DuVal, and Butler family charts posted on Ancestry.com (August 2012).