

## 077 CAMPBELL, JOHN WILSON

Bookseller & Publisher

Petersburg

Bookseller and schoolmaster in Petersburg (1806-42) who also published texts befitting his classical pedagogy; also father of the well-known Virginia historian, Charles Campbell.

Campbell came to Petersburg in 1806 from his native Rockbridge County. He is reported to have been trained there for the Presbyterian ministry, suggesting that he was a student at Lexington's Liberty Hall Academy (today Washington & Lee University) under Rev. William Graham. If so, then it is not surprising that, in his long bookselling career, his wares matched the perspective of the religious and historical works that were Graham's standards – books steeped in a classical context, but evincing modern rational analytics.

Yet that career evidently was not the one Campbell came to this Appomattox River port to pursue, as period accounts make references to "Rev. Campbell." Rather he opened a new classical school there, as many ministers then did, to sustain his new family while seeking a stable pulpit. This prudent approach would lead him into the book trade, as he sought out texts appropriate for his students. By February 1807, Campbell had obtained an assistant for his school, after having underestimated his ability to carry out his curriculum alone.

That change naturally allowed Campbell to devote more of his time to his book business, as seen in imprints circulating in the national book trade, where his name appeared from 1808 onward. At first, he was part of the distribution for quarterly and monthly magazines, most notably in a long association with Philadelphia's *Analectic Magazine* from its earliest days (1809) as *Select Reviews of Literature*. Before 1813, Campbell is noted as publisher or seller of at least eighteen distinct titles, most issuing from Philadelphia. Thereafter, he advertised connections to London suppliers, as well as those in New York and Boston. From the outset, he came into contact with two printers with whom he maintained ongoing relationships: Asa Lyman in Portland, Maine, and William Fry in Philadelphia. Lyman was a source for both educational texts and religious works, while Fry provided legal and medical books. Both men became essential figures in distributing Campbell's own publications, once he started down that road in 1813. Fry produced what was evidently Campbell's single most ambitious work, *Select American Speeches, Forensic and Parliamentary*, a two volume subscription effort in 1815. That collection tells of a key skill nurtured in Campbell's school: oratory.

The few publications that he penned, whether original or compiled, were all suitable for use in schools like his. But Campbell's most remembered work was one that evidently had an impact in his family. In 1813, he issued a one-volume account of Virginia's history through the surrender at Yorktown, in conjunction with the Philadelphia publisher Mathew Carey. It was, in its time, considered a worthy history of the state, presenting in one clearly-written volume what John Daly Burk (063) and his successors wrote in four; but its reputation was supplanted by another literary history produced in 1847 by his son Charles – one that evidently drew on the materials that Burk had used while he wrote his history in Petersburg. While father John was a child of the new Virginia, son Charles felt more closely associated with the Old Dominion's past, being a lineal descendant (through his mother) to the royal

governor Alexander Spotswood and revolutionary-era Colonel Bernard Moore.

As a result of his son's later prominence, Campbell is best remembered in Petersburg for his classical school, which had helped foster his son's authorial skills. The school was as well-known for the master's liberal use of a birch switch to maintain discipline, as it was for the prominent persons it gave the community. But the bookselling-teacher also served in a variety of appointive offices in local government, most notably as Collector in Petersburg's Customs Office. Still, despite his status, Campbell did not desire to run for elective office. He did, however, serve on partisan committees supporting of Andrew Jackson from the mid-1820s on; his most visible participation came when he led a town committee advocating the election of Martin Van Buren in 1836, when most feared the reported abolitionist-leanings of Jackson's vice president. Thusly did Campbell remain actively involved in the community until shortly before his death, which came on his sixty-third birthday in 1842.

### ***Personal Data***

Born:	Dec. 25	1779	Rockbridge County, Virginia.
Married:	June 17	1806	Mildred Walker Moore @ Rockbridge Cty, Va.
Died:	Dec. 25	1842	Petersburg, Dinwiddie County, Virginia.
Children:	Charles (b. 1807); Elizabeth (b.1809); Alexander S. (b. 1818).		

Sources: Imprints; Wyatt, *Checklist for Petersburg*; Scott & Wyatt, *Petersburg's Story*, Guide to the Campbell Papers, Swem Library, William & Mary; notices in *Petersburg Intelligencer*, 1807-20; genealogical data from Campbell family charts posted on Ancestry.com (August 2012).