

078 CAMPBELL, JOSEPH

Printer & Publisher

Morgantown

Founding publisher of *The Monongalia Gazette* (1804-10) at Morgantown in partnership with Forbes Britton (053).

Campbell was reportedly an Irish immigrant who trained in the print trade in Philadelphia; from that account, he probably came to America in his teen-age years before or during the Irish Rebellion of 1798. In Philadelphia, he met Forbes Britton, son of a well-to-do merchant family there who was also apparently training in the print trade. That meeting led the two to plan for striking out on their own, together, in the trans-Appalachian West.

They chose Morgantown – a small port town on the Monongahela River and county seat of Monongalia County – as the place to start a newspaper and job-printing office. Merchants there were increasingly pressed for access to the limited space then available in nearby Pittsburgh papers; their new paper was an effort to provide such access as readily indicated by their choice of the journal's title: *The Monongalia Gazette and Morgantown Advertiser*. Early histories of Morgantown claim that its publication began in January 1803, but its numbering indicates an actual starting date in January 1804. So it seems that Campbell & Britton arrived in 1803, and started the paper only once firmly settled. The *Gazette* appears to have been a quick success, surviving for more than six years, despite continual problems with bringing needed materials from eastern suppliers. Yet, after its second year, Britton sold his interest in the *Gazette* to Campbell and moved to nearby Clarksburg.

Campbell continued alone until the spring of 1810. At that time, it appears that he faced a combination of issues: the *Gazette* seems to have been losing money as subscriptions went unpaid in this cash-starved region; the growth of Pittsburgh drew job-printing away from his press; new non-printing opportunities were available to him in the growing town; and there was a potential buyer for his office. So in about March 1810, he sold the business and left the printing-trade forever. The buyer was John Osborne Laidley (258), the young son of an early Morgantown merchant, Thomas Laidley; this was a family with political ambitions; his father had been a Federalist delegate in Virginia's General Assembly before the Jeffersonian ascendancy of 1798; the *Monongalia Gazette* provided a chance for the family to shape public opinion in the area, and the Laidleys – father and son – took it. But by August 1810, however, they had come to understand the dire financial condition of the venture and so cut their losses, closing the town's first newspaper. Young John left for Parkersburg to study law with his brother, James Grant, starting a long legal career.

The new opportunities that Campbell realized were plainly more profitable than his press and paper had been for him. He engaged in real-estate speculation and the merchant trade in Monongalia County, becoming a substantial landowner. In 1815, he was elected county sheriff, and later served as county coroner. Eventually, he too left Morgantown, possibly to the Clarksburg area about 1820; in 1842, Marion County was formed from parts of both Monongalia and Harrison counties, and Campbell changed residential addresses without actually moving. It was on his Marion farm in 1850 that he passed on, at the age of seventy,

surrounded by the extensive family he had forged in the American interior.

Personal Data

Born: In 1780 Ireland.
Married: Feb. 7 1806 Elizabeth Boggess @ Harrison County, VA/WV
Died: In 1850 Marion County, VA/WV
Children: Anne (b. 1807); Jane (b. 1808); Elizabeth (b. 1811); Catherine;
Tabitha; Virginia; Joseph.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Norona & Shetler; Callahan, *Morgantown*; Wiley, *Monongalia County*; Core, *Monongalia*; genealogical data from Campbell family charts posted on Ancestry.com (August 2012)