

080 CAREY, JAMES [2]

Publisher

Richmond

Publisher of Richmond's first daily newspaper, *The Virginia Gazette, and Richmond Daily Advertiser*, in 1792; brother of Mathew Carey, the Philadelphia publishing entrepreneur.

Born in Ireland, Carey was a peripatetic figure throughout his life, the result – his brother would say – of an inability to manage the details of his enterprises. The saga of the brothers' emigration to America is both a family story and an Irish historical event. Their life in Dublin was wrapped up in the resistance of the United Irishmen in the 1780s and 1790s. Patriarch Christopher was a navy veteran who had been granted a bakery contract with the Royal Navy, affording him a prosperous living and the ability to quietly finance his sons' political ventures; four of his five sons – Mathew, James, Thomas, and William – were active in the movement, and in the printing-trade, with varying degrees of visibility.

Mathew (1760-1839) was the first to come to the attention of the colonial authorities; he published an anti-government tract in 1781 while still an apprentice bookseller, forcing his flight to France to avoid prosecution; in Paris he met Benjamin Franklin, who advised that he take refuge in Philadelphia; Mathew returned to Dublin instead, to start an opposition newspaper with his older brother Thomas, the *Volunteer's Journal*, financed by their father; in spring 1784, an essay published in their paper brought Mathew's arrest for seditious libel; when released on bail, their *Journal* was shuffled through a series of legal owners, though Mathew and Thomas still controlled the paper's content; by September, Mathew realized his re-arrest was imminent and fled to Philadelphia, arriving there in November 1784.

Thomas (b. 1758) now became the target for prosecutors; he was arrested in March 1785 on charges of high treason; father Christopher stepped into the case, testifying that Thomas was but a journeyman in a press office actually owned by someone he had sold the paper to in late 1784, leading to an acquittal. Yet the press itself evidently remained in the family, as it was used by all three of his Dublin-resident sons for job-printing in the late 1780s.

James first appeared as a proprietor in November 1791 as partner with his youngest brother William (1768-1839) in a new anti-government newspaper in Dublin, the *Rights of Irishmen; or, National Evening Star*. The endeavor quickly brought them trouble. James was evidently its editor, and as a result of letters he published, he soon found it expedient to join brother Mathew in America, leaving Dublin in February 1792; now William shuffled the paper's legal ownership to avoid prosecution until he went into hiding in early 1793 to avoid arrest; he emigrated as well, but to London, not America, joining brother John (1756-1826) there; he followed a career in art sales and engraving, while issuing the occasional political pamphlet.

On his arrival in America, James resided in Baltimore until about September 1792, probably working as a journeyman while he and Mathew made arrangements for his conducting another newspaper here. James chose Richmond as his next venue, the capital of the state perceived as most devoted to the revolutionary ideals of France and Ireland.

As the family's Dublin papers had been, this journal would be a daily one, a novel idea for Virginia. The first number of his *Virginia Gazette and Richmond Daily Advertiser* issued on

October 1st, evidently with the assistance of Augustine Davis (119), Virginia's new public printer. However, Carey did not manage the paper's business well. Publishing in the United States was different from his prior experience. He found that the collegial atmosphere of Dublin print shops did not exist on this side of the Atlantic; the country's printing centers were widely-dispersed across the landscape, requiring printers to maintain reliable long-distance relationships to support each press; indeed, the urban-centered model of Europe was just beginning to develop in Philadelphia, the place where it first appeared here. So by December, Carey could see the enterprise was failing, as promised monetary support did not materialize; he cut his publication frequency from daily to thrice-weekly on December 7th. The change did not stem the bleeding, however, and so he closed the paper on January 2, 1793, after issuing just 70 numbers.

Carey's analysis of his Virginia failure focused on a lack of advertising support, so he decided to move on to a more vibrant commercial center than Richmond then was and so try again. Charleston, South Carolina, was the largest seaport south of Philadelphia, and so promised substantial advertising revenues. In March 1793, just two months after his Richmond paper closed, Carey began publishing *The Star and Charleston Daily Advertiser*. This was only slightly more viable than his *Virginia Gazette*; after five months, he reduced the rate of its publication to thrice weekly at the end of July; but by the end of September, *The Star* too was closed. Another fast relocation followed, this time to nearby Savannah, Georgia. There Carey faced just one competitor for advertising revenue, as opposed to the three that he had faced in Richmond and Charleston. He also moved to control his costs by moving away from his standing daily mode. His twice-weekly *Georgia Journal and Independent Federal Register* issued on December 4, 1793. Yet this venture failed quickly too, closing in early February 1794; he discovered that he was challenging an established weekly in a place that distrusted Irish revolutionaries like Carey, whatever label he placed on his paper. Thus in less than eighteen months, Carey had opened and closed three different papers in three different venues.

In letters to his brother in Philadelphia, Carey complained of his bad luck. But having once failed at newspaper publishing himself, Mathew told him that he needed to lower his sights and concentrate on the less-glamorous, more reliable business of book and job printing. It seems that James took Mathew's advice, at least in part, as he returned to Charleston and opened a job-printing office. However, that shift in focus appears only an attempt to build a foundation for another try at journalism there. On January 3, 1795, Carey issued his second Charleston paper, the *Daily Evening Gazette*; but this was the shortest-lived of all his Southern ventures; after just six weeks he sold his interest in the paper to a local merchant and left the town permanently. Still, he was not yet persuaded that managing a newspaper was beyond his abilities – he just needed the right location. Carey relocated to Wilmington, North Carolina, a port town lacking a newspaper entirely, to try once again. His *Wilmington Chronicle and North-Carolina Advertiser* issued in July 1795, but this also soon foundered; he sold his interest in the paper at the end of 1795 and headed for Philadelphia.

Carey soon found the financial security that his brother had previously hinted at in the job-printing trade that sustained the country's largest print center. Several publishers there had removed themselves from the actual production of books, focusing on sales and distribution

while farming the press work out to independent contractors; indeed, this is what Mathew Carey did there, following a practice he had observed in Dublin. James Carey now became a job-printer, contracted by several publishers, including his brother. Yet, he could not shake an aspiration to become a noted journalist. In February 1797, after a year on the sidelines, he published another *Daily Advertiser* in Philadelphia; this time, his partner saw the futility of continuing in July, and sold his interest to Carey; the Irishman was only able to sustain the effort alone until September. Two more short-lived efforts would follow this. In January 1798 he issued *Carey's United States Recorder*; that paper lasted until the end of August. And then in December 1799, he began the *Constitutional Diary and Philadelphia Evening Advertiser*; this final journalistic effort lasted just two months.

In all of these endeavors, from Richmond to Philadelphia, the common denominator was Carey's failure to comprehend the business dynamic of journalism in American. The "fiery editor" – as all contemporary accounts depict him – had the reputation needed to attract backers, but he lacked the cool fiscal calculation seen in his brother's successful publishing enterprises. And after the *Constitutional Diary*, Carey would not again have the chance to gain such an understanding. He died suddenly in Philadelphia on February 2, 1801, almost exactly one year after the demise of his last journal. In just under nine years in America, he had opened and closed eight newspapers – a remarkable record of futility.

Personal Data

Born: In 1757 Dublin, Ireland
Died: Feb. 2 1801 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Died unmarried and without recorded issue.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Pollard, *Dublin Book Trade*; Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*; AAS Printer File.
Remarkably, Mathew Carey does not mention his brother James in his 1834 autobiography.