

**082 CARTER, GEORGE – [GEORGE WASHINGTON CARTER]**

**Publisher**

**Fredericksburg**

One of the founding publishers of *The Genius of Liberty, and Fredericksburg & Falmouth Advertiser* (1797-99) with Robert Mercer (300).

Carter was a minor figure in efforts by Republican leaders to produce newspapers in the state designed to counter the prevailing influence of its established Federalist journals, here the *Virginia Herald* of Fredericksburg, published by Connecticut-born Timothy Green (194).

Carter's participation in a venture headed by Robert Mercer, then Commonwealth Attorney for the Fredericksburg area, was evidently motivated by both political and familial loyalties. He was the son of Spotsylvania County planter Charles Carter, brother to the Revolutionary-era pamphleteer and political leader Landon Carter of Lancaster County, and cousin to the like-named Col. Charles Carter of King George County, all of whom were descendants of the famous colonial-era planter, Robert "King" Carter. The King George Carter had a son that he named after his prominent Lancaster cousin; that younger Landon Carter raised a daughter, Mildred Ann Byrd Carter, who married Mercer in 1792. So the relationship between Mercer and Carter was, at once, familial, generational, and commercial.

In 1796, Mercer was among the Fredericksburg-area Jeffersonians who enticed printer Lancelot Aylett Mullin (307) to relocate there from Fayetteville, North Carolina, to challenge Green's Federalist journal. He was then working for John Silbey in publishing the *Fayetteville Gazette*, a newspaper with suitable Republican credentials. However, political fidelity did not necessarily equate to business acumen, especially in the early American print trade. Mullin's *Republican Citizen* depended heavily on financial subsidies from its original backers, so never realized a profit. After a year of struggle (early June 1796 to mid-June 1797), the *Citizen* went into suspension; then in September 1797, Mullin absconded with what little cash he had generated there and a supply of books consigned to him by Mathew Carey of Philadelphia, one step ahead of his creditors and the sheriff. This misadventure reached a seriocomic conclusion when Mullin died on September 29, 1797 while on board a ship that was taking him to Charleston from Norfolk.

Mercer moved quickly to pick up the pieces of the debacle in the midst of the campaigns that fall for political control of the coming General Assembly. He acquired Mullin's press office, either from Mullin or in a sheriff's sale, with monies borrowed from his father-in-law, the younger Landon Carter, and quickly formed a partnership with his wife's cousin. George Carter was just twenty, and being junior to four older brothers, he was a perfect candidate for the project; his father died the year before Mercer took over the troubled press, and he would receive the least in the settlement of his father's estate; such circumstances made Carter the perfect junior partner for Mercer. Moreover, that familial footing also provided their new *Genius of Liberty* with a societal legitimacy that the antecedent *Republican Citizen* could never have matched. So on October 13th, the firm of Mercer & Carter issued the first number of the *Genius of Liberty*, less than a month after Mullin had fled. From its start, the pair employed tradesmen from beyond Fredericksburg to produce the newspaper, while the family – in the person of Robert Mercer – retained ownership of the office's tools, thus

retaining local control over its business affairs, in contrast to the earlier experience with Mullin. It seems to have been a successful approach, as the paper increased in frequency from a weekly to a twice-weekly pace in September 1798.

In the spring of 1799, however, Carter withdrew from the firm, possibly as a consequence of declining health, though his share of his father's estate settlement may have given him the chance to return to farming and land speculation, his father's former employments. Mercer then began a series of short-term partnerships with practical printers to continue publishing his journal, doing so until his unexpected death in September 1800. By that time, Carter was back in Spotsylvania County, living at or near his childhood home, never to return to the print trade. He died a premature death as well, succumbing in August 1809 on his father's homestead at just thirty-two-years of age.

### ***Personal Data***

Born:            In 1777        Spotsylvania County, Virginia.

Died:    Aug. 27    1809        Spotsylvania County, Virginia.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Stafford County Will & Order books; Weems Letters; Meade, *Old Churches*; Quinn, *Fredericksburg*; genealogical data from Carter family charts posted on Ancestry.com (August 2012).