

084 CARTER, JOHN M. – [JOHN MICHELL CARTER]

Engraver, Printer, Publisher

Richmond, Petersburg

Richmond engraver, associated with Edward Carter Stanard (399), his brother-in-law, in the *Spirit of Seventy-Six* (1808-1814); original publisher of *Arator* by John Taylor of Caroline.

Even with a notable Virginia surname, this Carter was further distinguished as the second son of a Revolutionary-era military surgeon, Thomas Carter of Gloucester County; his father served first in the Continental forces as a surgeon's mate, before being assigned to a cavalry unit in the Virginia line that aided the confinement of Lord Cornwallis's soldiers after the surrender at Yorktown. That divided service led to a denial of his military pension by both state and federal governments, with each seeing the other as responsible for his support; the appeals made by his children after his 1800 death reveal the familial links noted here.

By 1808, Carter was working as an engraver in Richmond. His father had died when he was just twelve, leaving five minor children and a destitute widow; his working as a trained craftsman there at age twenty indicates he was bound out to that trade shortly after 1800. Now an adult, his work was so respected in the city that he was invited in 1809 to engrave a presentation sword given by the state to Presley Neville O'Bannon, hero of the Tripolitan War. But Carter did not long stay in Richmond.

In September 1808, Edward C. Stanard, an Albemarle County lawyer and a distant cousin, issued the first number of his *Spirit of Seventy-Six*, a twice-weekly campaign paper intended to effect the election of James Monroe over James Madison as successor to President Thomas Jefferson; built on the promise of a "frequent recurrence to fundamental principles is essential to the liberties of a Republic," the journal was a decidedly an anti-administration one, giving voice to the opinions of those Republicans often called the *Tertium Quids*. Carter was evidently part of Stanard's office from the start – possibly with his older brother, James B. Carter, as well; two years earlier, the proprietor had married Rebecca Carter, their sister, in Richmond, indicating that the Carter siblings were established in the capital by then, a period when an eighteen-year-old Carter would have been finishing his training in the metal-engraving trade; Stanard was also established there by then, leading to his being called (and rejected) as a juror in the 1807 treason trial of Aaron Burr. Once Madison was inaugurated, however, Stanard's focus was redirected to a national audience; in November 1809 he relocated his office and paper to Washington City, retaining both the paper's name and perspective – as well as the trade services of John and James Carter. Indirect evidence suggests that Stanard's relocation may have been assisted by George Tucker and John Taylor of Caroline, both noteworthy Quids.

Carter soon found himself a proprietor of this opposition journal. Stanard died unexpectedly in early December 1810, barely a year after the move from Richmond, leaving "a young and disconsolate widow and two infant children" for whom Carter now held some responsibility. In the *Spirit's* next issue, he and his brother James announced that "a capable successor will be sought," so keeping an "independent paper at the seat of general government" alive. Yet there was no transfer of power, editorial or otherwise, until May 1813; in the meantime Carter became the editorial part of a partnership with his brother and his sister; together

the family moved their press office to Georgetown in February 1811.

Eventually, the three siblings sold a one-third interest in their newspaper to Ebenezer H. Cummins, with John Carter remaining a named partner, but yielding his editorial duties to Cummins. That relationship was tumultuous, with Cummins taking stands that the Carter brothers opposed; he was "ousted" from the firm in November 1813, with James taking Cummins's place on the journal's masthead alongside his brother John. Rebecca Stanard undoubtedly remained in the mix as well, which meant that a suspension soon ensued to allow for the settlement of accounts with Cummins and with the office's suppliers. When the *Spirit* finally reappeared in February 1814, John had retired from the operation of the paper as a part of that settlement, leaving James alone as its public face.

The Spirit of Seventy-Six did not long survive the younger Carter's departure. James was also heavily involved in printing the *Federal Republican* – the notorious Baltimore Federalist journal driven out of that city in July 1812 by Jeffersonian mobs, angered by its opposition to "Mr. Madison's War;" it found a temporary refuge in Georgetown. Its proprietors were not printers, and apparently the Carter brothers had helped in its publication from its arrival there. By early 1814, James faced with a clear choice: either a strictly-limited non-controversial role in printing the *Federal Republican* or an opened-ended controversial one as the proprietor of the *Spirit*: he chose the former role and closed the family's paper that March. At the end of 1815, shortly before the *Federal Republican* returned to Baltimore, John advertised the sale of the family's press in the *National Intelligencer*. This marked the end of both brothers' career as practical printers.

John, however, remained a sometime publisher, using practical printers as contractors. The family's association with John Taylor of Caroline meant the Carters became the publishers of his collected "Arator" essays when they were first issued (anonymously) in 1813. Carter had printed Taylor's first essay just three weeks after Stanard's untimely death in December 1810, and by February 1812, the Carter brothers were soliciting subscriptions for publishing a collection of fifty of Taylor's essays, all previously published in their *Spirit*, a project that became the 1813 Georgetown edition. A year later, John published a second edition there, without his brother, "revised and enlarged" to sixty-one essays. Carter held the copyright to this influential work through at least 1818, publishing four more editions of *Arator, being a series of agricultural essays, practical & political* in those years – a third edition in 1817 out of Baltimore (employing Joseph Robinson, formerly the printer of the *Federal Republican*), and fourth, fifth, and sixth editions of the now-standard sixty-four essay version in 1818 from the Petersburg press of Thomas Whitworth (443) and Francis G. Yancey (463). This clustering, coming immediately after the War of 1812, suggests both men's interest in countering the emerging Whig perspective of political leaders like Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams. It seems that Carter may have been trying to emulate Taylor's principles, as he was managing a plantation in Brunswick County in 1820.

In 1824, Carter's life changed. Taylor died that year, taking his old agrarian perspective with him; hence, *Arator* became an artifact of the past and not a guide to the country's future; Carter issued no further editions of the work. More to the point, he was now involved in the commercial pursuits needed to support a young family; he married that year and four infant

children soon resulted. Carter likely had obligations to his widowed sister as well, as their two families now lived near each other in Richmond's Monroe Ward after 1820. It was in this domesticated setting that Carter died in 1832, just forty-four years old.

Personal Data

Born: about 1788 Gloucester County, Virginia.
Married: In 1824 Ann Bowyer Davies @ Gloucester County, Va.
Died: in 1832 Richmond, Henrico County, Virginia
Children: Marco Bozarris (b. 1826), Martha Broadnax (b. 1828), Lucy Emily (b. 1830), and Henrian Nelson Cabell (b. 1832).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; *Tyler's Quarterly*; Revolutionary Bounty Warrants & Gov. William H. Cabell Papers, Library of Virginia; *Acts of the Assembly*, 1825-26; Federal Decennial Census, 1820 & 1830; Wyatt, *Checklist for Petersburg*; Stohrer, "Arator: A Publishing History," *VMHB* 1980; advertisements in *Spirit of Seventy-Six* and the *National Intelligencer*, 1812-15.

The AAS Printer File, among many other sources, incorrectly identifies him John Michael Carter; middle name of Michell derives from Huguenot ancestor of his father's side, and not any typographical error.