

091 CHARTER, NATHANIEL

Printer

Richmond

Journeyman printer working in Richmond (1809-10) who became both a major merchant in the city and an alderman on the Common Council.

Charter was a part of the network of printers spread over New England by Isaiah Thomas, publishing entrepreneur of Worcester and Boston, Massachusetts, and the founder of the American Antiquarian Society. His first and only newspaper proprietorship came in Walpole, New Hampshire, where he published the *Political Observatory* in partnership with Salma Hale; the two purchased the paper in April 1805 and continued together until June 1807. It appears Charter left the partnership following the death of his first wife in January 1807, and began a career as an itinerant journeyman printer, leaving New England forever.

By early 1809, Charter was at work in Richmond, though for whom is unclear; indeed, the more important fact is that he chose to finally leave the print trade while in Virginia after a period of transient employment, one that probably began during the Assembly sessions of 1807 and 1808. He turned instead to the grocery trade, building a considerable business in the capital by 1819, in part by acting as an agent for New York City mercantile houses. He married in Richmond for a second time and raised a family of seven children there. Charter became a part of Richmond's civic life as well, serving in the Richmond Light Infantry from about 1810 and serving as an alderman on the Common Council from 1825 to 1835. Remarkably, the former publisher was elected to a vigilance committee in 1835 that was charged with preventing the dissemination of antislavery literature in Richmond and Henrico County. He died in his adopted home in his fifty-eighth year, and was interred in the burial ground that was transformed into Hollywood Cemetery a decade later.

Personal Data

Born: May 19 1780 Ellington, Connecticut.

Married [1]: Dec. 1805 Lavina Trowbridge @ West Haven, Conn. [d. 1807]

Married [2]: May 25 1809 Winifred L. Johnston @ Richmond, Virginia.

Died: July 15 1837 Richmond, Virginia.

Children: Harriet (b. 1813), Eliza (b. 1815) Adelaide (b. 1819), Araminta (b. 1820), Virginia (b. 1825), George (b. 1826), Julia (b. 1836)

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Richmond city directory, 1819; Federal Decennial Census, 1820 & 1830; Cutchins. "Richmond Light Infantry Blues;" newspaper notices in *Virginia Argus*, *Richmond Enquirer*, and *Richmond Whig*, 1809-35; genealogical data from Charter family charts posted on Ancestry.com (August 2012).