

092 CHILES, SAMUEL

Publisher

Fredericksburg

Publisher of Fredericksburg's *Virginia Express* (1803-04) as partner to Isham Burch (062).

Chiles was a well-to-do landowner in Caroline County with political ambitions. As a result, he became part of an ongoing effort in the Fredericksburg area to establish a Jeffersonian newspaper that could challenge the dominance of the Federalist-oriented *Virginia Herald* of Timothy Green (194) there. That effort had started in 1796, but had seen a succession of failed papers as each folded from a either lack of subscriber support or the death of its founder – the *Republican Citizen* in 1797, the *Genius of Liberty* in 1800, the *Courier* in 1801, and the *Fredericksburgh News-Letter* in 1802.

In 1803, Chiles evidently financed, and probably edited, the next challenger, the *Virginia Express*. His partner was Isham Burch, a practical printer from nearby Hanover County; Burch had trained as a printer in the Richmond office of Samuel Pleasants (331) in the late 1790s, and then worked in the Republican press complex established there by Meriwether Jones (242), the state's public printer from 1799 to 1804. Burch's tenure in Fredericksburg was his first independent press operation. Chiles was his willing partner in the contest with Green, as he was then looking to establish a political reputation in the area and so build toward his ambitions to electoral office. The combination of Chiles's partisan perspective with Burch's trade skills led to publication of *The Virginia Express* on May 2, 1803.

The new paper was apparently one aligned with the views of Jefferson's critics within his own party (the *Tertium Quids*) later embodied by Chiles's neighbor, John Taylor of Caroline, among others. That approach meant that the proprietors quickly encountered competition from James Walker (425), publisher of the late *Courier*, the town's only Republican journal during the heated 1800 election. He resurrected his old paper in September 1803 after a twenty-month suspension as *The Apollo*, apparently at the behest of Jeffersonians in that neighborhood who were unhappy with the new *Virginia Express*.

As the 1804 election campaign approached, the proprietors of both papers were apparently pressed to find an accommodation that would create a single Republican paper to advocate for Jefferson's re-election in Fredericksburg, especially in light of the dominance of Green's *Virginia Herald*. The ensuing course of events suggests that just such a compromise was agreed to; in late March 1804, Walker ceased publishing his *Apollo* after a six-month run, reporting that his doing so was a financial necessity; then in mid-May 1804, less than two months later, Chiles withdrew from the concern publishing the *Virginia Express*. In the wake of Chiles's retirement, the *Express* began to focus more on the faults of the president's foes than on Jefferson's perceived ideological failings as before.

This transition gives the impression that the original partnership agreement between Chiles and Burch facilitated these changes. It seems that the firm of Chiles & Burch was built upon a one-year contract between printer and financier (from May 1803 to May 1804) with each contributing to the paper's content. Such a limited commitment was common among those starting journals in this era, a limitation that often led to the paper's demise when that

initial contract ended. Yet here, the dissolution of the Chiles & Burch firm did not doom the *Virginia Express*. Rather, Burch had enough capital from the first year that, with other funds provided by his brother, Elisha Burch (061), he could purchase Chiles's interest and continue issuing his twice-weekly journal, Moreover, once Chiles had exited, the brothers found new support among Jefferson's supporters in the Fredericksburg area.

While Chiles's departure from the *Virginia Express* was the end of his journalistic career, he remained politically active and motivated. Eventually, he was elected to House of Delegates as one of Caroline County's two representatives, serving from 1825 to 1829. Unfortunately that was the full extent of his long-desired public service, as he died suddenly in the midst of the 1828-29 Assembly session. His delegate-peers voted to wear black-crepe armbands in his honor and adjourned for several days out of respect.

Little other information on Chiles and his family is still extant as Caroline County is one of Virginia's unfortunate "burned counties" – one where the courthouse was destroyed, in this case during the Civil War, so taking the legal records before that date with it.

Personal Data

Born: in 1771 Caroline County, Virginia

Died: Feb. 9 1829 Caroline County, Virginia

Family: 1820 Census records a wife and seven children – four daughters
 under ten, one daughter & two sons between ten and sixteen;
 no names yet discovered.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Federal Decennial Census, 1820; notices in *Virginia Argus* and *Richmond Enquirer*, 1807-29; Journal of the House of Delegates, 1828-29 session.