

## 112 CUMMINS, EDWARD

Bookbinder

Williamsburg, Norfolk

Bookbinder in Williamsburg's printing offices (1748-74) and that of the *Norfolk Intelligencer* (1775); probably then worked in Williamsburg during Revolution (1776-80), before ending career in Richmond office (1783-84) of James Hayes (207).

Cummins had a well-documented public life between 1748 and 1780 in Williamsburg and York County, but little is known of his private life. He can be seen in court records as early as 1748, which suggests an initial trade association with William Parks (321), Virginia's first authorized printer; but the first explicit evidence of his work as a binder comes from the business records of William Hunter (230) and Joseph Royle (370), the successors to Parks. In the 1750s, Cummins maintained a lodging house on Francis Street near the Capitol, and can be seen in similar situations around the town until 1780, indicating that he did not reside on the premises of the Williamsburg Printing Office, as some employees did. Indeed, one of his changing residences was burglarized in 1768, as reported in the *Virginia Gazette*.

As a binder in Williamsburg, Cummins was tied to the succession of authorized printers that had begun with Parks in 1730; but with the death of Joseph Royle in January 1766, and the arrival of William Rind (358) later that spring, he had the choice of aligning with one of the two printing offices there or starting an independent bindery. His choice of the Rind office then is intriguing, given the long duration of his employment with Parks, Hunter, Royle, and then Alexander Purdie (345), when the printer directed Royle's office during his master's terminal illness. It may be that Cummins expected a larger role in that established office after Royle's death; but that press was tied to the estates of both Royle and Hunter, and so to their heirs. Purdie had to take on the administrator of those estates, John Dixon Sr. (140), as a partner for eight years in order to untangle the mess. With Rind now in town, Cummins apparently thought his new office was then the better option. However, that choice proved problematic. By 1773, Rind's hefty indebtedness left Cummins with an unpaid salary of £150, resulting in at least four suits against the binder for his unpaid debts during his time with Rind; in the twenty years before that, Cummins had been sued for debt just twice, both during the fiscally disruptive French & Indian War.

Between Rind's death in 1773 and his arrival in Norfolk in 1775, Cummins seems to have been plying his trade independently in Williamsburg, as evinced by advertisements placed in the Purdie & Dixon *Gazette*. But his prior relationships with the Hunter and Holt families in the colonial capital brought him to Norfolk to work for a scion of both: John Hunter Holt (223). As a result, Cummins found himself caught up in the heated conflict between Holt and the royal governor, Lord Dunmore (153). Dunmore had fled Williamsburg in May 1775 following the publication of one of his dispatches to London, in which he laid out plans for dealing with Virginia's revolutionary leadership by laying waste to their plantations; now, he tried to administer the rebellious colony from aboard ships in the Chesapeake Bay, usually anchored off Norfolk. Holt ridiculed Dunmore and his associates in the pages of his weekly *Norfolk Intelligencer* all that summer, culminating in scatological attacks in September. On Saturday September 30th, Dunmore dispatched a company of royal marines to seize Holt,

his press and supplies, and anyone working in that press office. The raiders captured binder Cummins and two printers, Alexander Cameron (076) and Donald McDonald (286), but not Holt. For the next few months, Cummins was part of an impressed crew operating Holt's press for Dunmore's administration on board the merchantman *Eilbeck*.

When Dunmore and his fleet finally left Virginia in August 1776, Cummins stayed behind, likely of his own volition, as the printers Cameron and McDonald were a willing part of the Loyalist exodus accompanying Dunmore. Through at least August 1780, Cummins lived and worked in Williamsburg; that date suggests that he returned to Purdie's employ, and so was part of his nephews' office – John Clarkson (093) and Augustine Davis (119) – after his death in 1779. After that, he may have remained in the old colonial capital doing bindery work for the French forces that arrived in the neighborhood in 1781 and who then stayed until 1783, a client that saved the firm of Clarkson & Davis. However, when the firm failed to move to Richmond after the French withdrawal, Cummins was compelled to find a new employer. As the rest of the town's print-tradesmen had relocated to Richmond in early 1780, he would also have to pursue binding work there, landing in the office of James Hayes, the new public printer. His employment there through 1784, when he finally disappears from the imprint record indicates, suggests that he either retired or died at that time.

Cummins evidently married while working for William Hunter, as a son was born in 1761; but his wife went unrecorded. It appears that either his wife or their son died before 1769, when he paid an annual assessment one dependent (a titheable). Such is the extent of the record of his family life, and it ends as abruptly as does that of his public life.

### ***Personal Data***

Born: Late 1720s?

No data found on his wife; an infant son, James, baptized in 1761.

Sources: Williamsburg Printing Office daybooks, 1750-66; York County Records Project & Williamsburg People files, CWF; Clement & Hemphill. *Bookbinding in Williamsburg*; Van Schreeven, *Revolutionary Virginia*; Hubbard on Richmond; notices in Williamsburg's *Virginia Gazettes*, 1752-80.