

124 DAVIS, JOHN [1]

Publisher

Lynchburg

Founder and publisher of the *Lynchburg Weekly Museum* (1797-98).

John Davis was a son of Lynchburg, tied to its founders, but who gave up the town over the question of slavery. That turn came from his Quaker roots. He was the son of William Davis Jr., a prominent Quaker merchant there and son of an early inhabitant William Davis Sr. His mother was Zalinda Lynch, daughter of the town's founder, John Lynch, and a niece of Col. Charles Lynch, the Revolutionary militia figure frequently credited for "lynch law" from his impromptu hangings of Loyalists during the war. Thus John Davis came from a peculiar mix of Quaker non-violence and frontier vengeance in this fledgling James River port town.

As a son of a merchant, Davis understood that Lynchburg's continued growth was tied to the success of its mercantile community; he also came to believe a weekly advertising paper was key to that outcome. In the spring of 1797, Davis acquired the dormant press of Robert Mosby Bransford (049), who ended a three-year-long effort at publishing the town's first newspaper – the *Lynchburg and Farmer's Gazette* – in February 1796. He picked up where Bransford had left off, launching the *Lynchburg Weekly Museum* on June 2, 1797. Despite its immediate success, however, Davis sold the paper to his editor, John Carter (083), just one year later and left his hometown forever.

In the 1790s, the Quaker communities of Virginia were enmeshed in a debate over slavery, specifically whether they could continue to live in a state where it was actively condoned. That debate followed an earlier one on the morality of owning slaves, resulting in a general divestiture among the faithful, usually through manumissions, and expelling those unwilling to renounce the peculiar institution. Now, many Friends in Virginia decided that leaving the state was the only way to escape the tarnishing influence of slavery; large numbers of Quakers had already migrated to Ohio and Kentucky and Davis's family was about to follow.

In 1798, as part of his family's divestiture of its properties in and around Lynchburg, Davis sold his paper to Carter; shortly thereafter he joined his father near Cincinnati. In Ohio, he became a merchant, following his father's lead. The prosperous Lynchburg expatriate died there in the summer of 1830.

Personal Data

Born: Sept. 24 1774 Near Lynchburg, Virginia.
Married: July 7 1805 Hannah B. Anthony @ Lynchburg, Virginia.
Died: Aug. 13 1830 Cincinnati, Ohio.
Children: Only one found: Hannah (b. 1823).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Yancey, *Lynchburg*; Cabell, *Sketches of Lynchburg*; genealogical data from Davis family charts posted on Ancestry.com (September 2012).