

128 DAVISON, WILLIAM**Publisher****Norfolk**

Founder and only publisher of the short-lived *Norfolk and Portsmouth Gazette* (1789).

William Davison was a Pennsylvania-born, Philadelphia-trained printer who came to Norfolk in 1789 to produce a weekly mercantile advertiser. The port was then without such a paper following the demise of *The Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal* with the death of its founder, John McLean (297) that May. However, Davison found himself at a disadvantage when he arrived that summer. Two Virginia-born-and-bred journeymen – William Prentis (340) and Daniel Baxter (027) – had acquired the McLean press from his estate and were then close to issuing their own replacement paper, *The Norfolk and Portsmouth Chronicle*. With his own press in hand, Davison was committed to at least an attempt at publishing his competing *Norfolk and Portsmouth Gazette*, and so issued its first number on September 9th, just eleven days after the Prentis & Baxter journal began. Still, that head start was not the largest difficulty he faced; his two competitors had well-established Virginia connections, dating back to pre-Revolutionary Williamsburg, which gave them a sizable subscriber base that he could not soon match. Recognizing that his journal was doomed, Davison ceased publication after just five issues, returning to Philadelphia with his press.

Davison was not deterred by his Norfolk experience. The Pennsylvania legislature had split a new Franklin County off from neighboring Cumberland in 1784; the new county's leaders in Chambersburg were then seeking a printer willing to come there to produce a journal-of-record for the county and advertise its merchants and services. Davison answered their call, evidently in early 1790, about six months after he left Virginia. In July 1790, his *Western Advertiser and Chambersburg Weekly Newspaper* issued its first number. Unfortunately, within a year, Davison's health began to fail; by July 1792, he had been compelled to bring in a partner from Philadelphia, one Robert Harper, to conduct the business for him. His long-expected death came in July 1793, possibly being not yet thirty years old. Remarkably, Harper was a wise choice; the paper continued under him or his brother until the 1840s.

Personal Data

Died: July 1793 Chambersburg, Franklin County, Pennsylvania

Died "leaving a wife, Mary, and a son, Francis."

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Seilhamer, *Annals of Franklin County*.