

## 130 DAWSON, RUSSEL

Publisher

Lynchburg

Publisher of *The Echo* (1816-17) at Lynchburg as partner to William Waller Gray (193).

Dawson was a native of nearby Bedford County when he joined with William Waller Gray to start a new Republican paper in Lynchburg. The pair professed that "we have both been brought up in the printing business, and we are not utter strangers to the due management and proper conduct of a newspaper." That training apparently came in the office of Fleming Grantland (185), founding publisher of the *Lynchburg Press*. Gray had managed that office following Grantland's removal to Georgia to join his brother Seaton (186) in conducting that state's public printing office, before he moved on to Richmond to work in the office of Samuel Pleasants (331), then Virginia's public printer. Dawson either went with Gray in Richmond, though he is not recorded there, or stayed in the Lynchburg office when it was sold to Jacob Haas in 1811 and continued there for some time thereafter. This new venture would be the first independent office for both men.

The firm of Rives (540) & Davies (539) operated the *Lynchburg Centinel* there during 1815, but it had expired by November, when the auction of its press and office were advertised. Dawson and Gray were in possession of their press by February 1816, when they published a prospectus notice in Pleasants' *Virginia Argus*; that the pair ended up in control of that particular press indicates that they had some support from local Jeffersonians, as had the *Centinel* and its predecessor, the *Lynchburg Star*. The two reinforced that partisan support by employing Gerard Banks (019), a well-known Jeffersonian journalist, to edit their paper during the presidential election campaign that fall.

Only four issues of the *Echo* survive, all from summer 1816, so the date it ceased publishing is uncertain; however, an advertising notice placed in the *National Intelligencer* in May & June 1818 indicates that the paper continued until about mid-June 1818. His connection to the project implies that *The Echo* was intended as a campaign paper in support of James Monroe as James Madison's successor that year. But as it was still in print in 1818 shows that Dawson and Gray hoped to carry on the Republican legacy embodied by the *Centinel* and the *Star* with *The Echo*. Yet their link to the paper they founded came to an end after just a year, when Gray was induced to return to Richmond to join Thomas Burling (066), a friend and long-time associate, in publishing a weekly there called *The Spirit of Union*. They transferred the journal to printer Tubal Early Strange (406), who appears to have been a journeyman working in their office.

In 1819, Dawson and Gray appear to have decided to launch a second Lynchburg paper. *The Spirit of Union* experienced a swift and ignominious demise in January 1818 with Thomas Burling's suicide; then when Strange closed the *Echo* the following summer, Dawson signed a promissory note for funds loaned to him by two local merchants, secured by Dawson's father, Pleasant, so beginning the process of starting another journal there. But that project never came to fruition; Gray stayed in Richmond when Dawson left Lynchburg after having received those monies. Following his father's death in 1837, the son was found in default of those loans when his father's estate could not make good their security, never answering a

summons to appear in the Chancery Court to explain his conduct.

By 1830, Dawson resided on a farm in south-eastern Indiana with his Amherst-County-born wife, joining an influx of Southerners in what later became Union County. There the couple raised a family of at least six children and settled into prosperous life on the prairie, funded, in part it seems, with the loans Dawson took out in 1819. He died in Illinois in 1891, at the well advanced age of ninety-five.

***Personal Data***

Born: May 13 1795 Bedford County, Virginia  
Married: Feb 27 1816 Mary Burks @ Amherst County, Virginia  
Died: Apr 21 1891 Center Township, Union County, Indiana  
Children: Sarah (b. 1817), Wellington (b. 1820), Margahet (b. 1822), Pleasant (b. 1826), Mary (b. 1826), Martha (b. 1830).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Hubbard on Richmond; Chancery Court records for Bedford County, 1848; genealogical data from Dawson family charts posted on Ancestry.com (August 2012).