

136 DIGGES, WILLIAM

Bookseller

Lynchburg

Lynchburg bookseller (1818-25) initially with Giles Ward (429) as Ward & Digges (1818-21).

Tracing Digges is challenging given the number of like-named individuals living in Virginia during his known lifetime. It is further complicated by his birth in the Digges family hearth of Elizabeth City. So little can be discerned except the spare details from his 1836 obituary.

This son of the tidewater had moved to Lynchburg by 1818 to buy into the bookstore kept there by Giles Ward. A Campbell County resident, Ward had opened his store there in 1816 in partnership with Anderson M. Waddill (423) of Chesterfield County. Both were lawyers for most of their lives; Ward was then reading for the bar, possibly with the then actively-practicing Waddill, and their store was a convenient way to subsidize Ward's training and to expand Waddill's library, as evinced by the titles recorded in their advertising; the firm of Waddill & Ward faced competition from at least two other bookstores there, as well as from the imprints available at Lynchburg's two printing offices, so such specialization was a key to their business's survival. In mid-1818, Waddill sold his interest in the book-store to Digges, moving on to Rockingham County, North Carolina, where he was serving as a justice of the peace in a year later. Ward would eventually do the same, selling his share to Digges in late 1821 when he was licensed to practice law in local courts. Digges then continued the business alone until at least 1825.

In his Lynchburg years, Digges developed a theatrical reputation, forming a Thespian Society in the town in conjunction with Ward and others. One contemporary observer noted that their efforts matched those of travelling acting troupes, especially in performing dramas. In 1825, the Society was even engaged to offer a summer series of plays as a fund-raising effort for the town's new Episcopal Church.

Beyond that summer though, Digges' presence in Lynchburg is far from certain. Other, larger bookselling concerns began moving in around 1820, challenging any store not totally focused on pursuing that trade. Moreover, this Digges may be the William Digges who was attempting to develop the nearby town of Lovington, the new Nelson County seat on the road to Charlottesville, in the mid-1820s. Whatever the case, this Digges is not again seen definitively in the public record until his death in Richmond in 1836, where he had been "for some time a resident." No information on any surviving family was recorded either.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1790s Elizabeth City County [now Hampton], Virginia

Died: May 9 1836 Richmond, Henrico County, Virginia

Details about a wife or children not yet discovered.

Sources: notices in *Lynchburg Press*, 1816-1820; Cabell, *Sketches of Lynchburg*; obituary in *Lynchburg Virginian* 12 May 1836; not in MEDSA Index.