

139 DINMORE, RICHARD – [DR. RICHARD DINMORE]

Bookseller & Publisher

Alexandria

Publisher of the *Alexandria Expositor* (1802-09) both with James Lyon (274) and on his own.

Dinmore was a child of the English radical movement of the 1790s and, as such, found it necessary to emigrate when faced with a probable prosecution for his writings. Born and raised in East Anglia during the Revolutionary era, Dinmore evinced pro-American attitudes from an early age, the result of an education grounded in Enlightenment philosophy. He eventually enrolled in a London medical school, graduating in 1788 as a licensed physician. Returning to Norfolk, he established a medical practice in the small market-town of Watton, some 20 miles west of Norwich, his hometown. Dinmore soon found the actual practice of medicine frustrating and diverted himself by writing political essays that became ever more fractious as the French Revolution developed. In 1793, he published his first pamphlet, one highly critical of the parliamentary system; as a result, he was forced to leave rural Watton for urban Norwich. There he joined old friends in the grain-trade with continental Europe; but the ongoing war with France, ironically the likely impetus for his choice of a business, succeeded in destroying their firm. His frustrations were multiplied by the Parliamentary elections of 1796, wherein the essential interests of businessmen like him were ignored by entrenched politicians. This prompted his writing a pamphlet advocating radical reforms to the electoral system and denouncing the Tory and Whig factions in Parliament alike for their self-interested deceptions; while the tract saw three editions issued in less than a year, that popularity made Dinmore fear for his freedom under Britain's sedition laws. In the fall of 1797, he removed to America, landing in the new Federal District with a wife and son.

Dinmore had planned for this possibility and so had invested in American stocks as a way to move his limited wealth across the Atlantic; however, the New York agent he engaged to liquidate those shares failed at just this moment and Dinmore lost everything. He now had to find a new way to make a living. Drawing on his early educational training, he opened a boarding school and bookstore in the District in May 1798. After about a year, Dinmore was able to invest in a grocery and liquor store in Georgetown with a fellow English émigré. But once again, he found his plans disrupted, this time by the death of his partner in early 1800, which forced a closing of their store. By this time, though, Dinmore's interest in promoting the most recent European books in history and philosophy had drawn him into the capital's Jeffersonian circles, ones he found sympathetic with his liberalized political philosophies; in turn, these friendly patrons paved the way for him to express those views in newly-founded American publications.

Central to Dinmore's transition to journalism in 1800 was James Lyon, son of the Vermont publisher and congressman Matthew Lyon. The elder Lyon had been caned on the House floor by Roger Griswold, a Connecticut Federalist, for Lyon's disrespectful attitude toward his "social betters" in Congress; Lyon published an inflammatory pamphlet about the affair during his 1798 Congressional campaign and was promptly jailed under the Federalists' new Sedition Act; though winning reelection from his jail cell, his effectiveness was constrained, and he removed to Kentucky in 1801. Meanwhile, son James was invited by Jefferson and

his leadership cadre to come to Virginia and inaugurate a series of new political papers supporting the Virginian's presidential candidacy, using his family's new-found prominence to draw financing. Once victory seemed assured in mid-1800, Lyon closed the paper he had opened in Richmond and relocated his press to Georgetown; there he began issuing a new series of his year-old *National Magazine*, now subtitled *Cabinet of the United States*. The move was Lyon's first in a series of enterprises designed to supplant the District's Federalist publishers; he wanted to add a daily newspaper, a bookstore and circulating library, a book-and-job-printing business, and a paper mill to his existing weekly magazine.

It appears that Dinmore was involved with Lyon's plan from its start in September 1800, contributing to his magazine, although not credited directly with such until he assumed the editor's chair in October 1801. By then, Dinmore had replaced Lyon as the driving force behind the planned circulating library; the Englishman opened its doors in June 1801 at a location just off the President's Square. Dinmore also became one of the literary directors of Lyon's new Washington Printing and Bookselling Company that August. For the moment, the newspaper component was deferred in favor of the existing Jeffersonian journal of James D. Westcott (437), an Alexandria publisher and bookseller who's *Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser* helped promote Lyon's ventures. This rapid growth put a strain on Lyon's finances and evidently exhausted Dinmore's as well. Lyon had transferred ownership of the *Cabinet* to the new publishing firm in October 1801, when Dinmore assumed its editorial side; but now as the company's fiscal director, Lyon realized that he had to close that money-losing periodical in January 1802. Instead, the pair offered a new *American Literary Advertiser* that March, a weekly with a belle-lettrés perspective more attuned to Dinmore's tastes rather than the partisan one reflecting those of Lyon.

This reshuffle presaged their concurrent interest in finally starting the planned newspaper, and Westcott's daily became the means to that end. In May 1802, John Westcott Sr. (438), James D. Westcott's aging father and fiscal partner, retired from their joint venture; by the fall, *The Times* was beginning to founder financially, having reduced its daily frequency to thrice-weekly; Westcott now began looking for potential buyers. In late November, the new firm of Lyon & Dinmore purchased his newspaper (though not his press) and immediately recast the journal as the *Alexandria Expositor and the Columbian Advertiser*; the partners also moved their existing office across the Potomac to produce it. The *Expositor* took on an ever sharper tone against Jefferson's opponents over the next two years, so drawing considerable fire from the surviving Federalist papers in the area, particularly from their cross-town rival, the *Alexandria Advertiser* of Samuel Snowden (393). Still, their revenues appear to have been encouraging as the partners now considered new ventures.

In the fall of 1803, they circulated a prospectus for another newspaper. Anticipating the coming transfer of the Louisiana Territory in December, they proposed publishing a new English-language, twice-weekly journal in New Orleans. This proposal marked a turning point for Lyon, who planned to be its resident proprietor. He was now looking for new opportunities beyond Washington, evidently discouraged by the tepid reception his efforts had received in the capital district. Lyon opened *The Union or New-Orleans Advertiser and Price Current* on December 13th, exactly one week before the formal handover, as James Lyon & Co. In May 1804, he became that paper's sole owner without Dinmore ever having

appeared as a named proprietor, contrary to their original intent. That change heralded a choice by each man to go their own way, with Dinmore inheriting only a portion of what their alliance had built in the preceding three years. He quickly scaled back the Washington operation, closing his *prized American Literary Advertiser* in March 1804, with its publishing house soon following suit. In August, Lyon sold his remaining interest in the *Expositor* to Dinmore, bringing their relationship to a formal conclusion. Dinmore was listed as the sole collector of the old firm's debts, so demonstrating that the remnants of Lyon's grand plan had now become the physician's business alone.

Initially, there was little manifest change in the *Expositor*. Dinmore continued its pointed critiques of Federalists, which brought criticism down on his head as being a "tool of Lyon." But his partner had left the capital, never to return in a journalistic capacity, so making the paper one reflecting Dinmore's opinions. At the same time, he took on a larger role in the city's political culture, serving as secretary to the Tammany Society of Alexandria. However, his increased visibility and public engagement was short-lived. This period of Dinmore's print-trade career would be the most difficult even as he finally attained full control over the fruits of his labors. In the midst of his break-up with Lyons, his wife died, leaving him to care for an infant daughter. Furthermore, his health, never considered robust as a result of a sickly childhood, now began to deteriorate, especially with recurring episodes of gout. In response to both, Dinmore moved to reduce the stress on him personally. Twice, he slowed the frequency of the *Expositor's* publication, first from daily to thrice-weekly with the 1804 departure of Lyon, then to twice-weekly in November 1805. In March 1806, he resumed his former thrice-weekly pace, likely indicating a new investment in hired hands rather than any recovery of his health. And that summer he remarried, taking the widowed daughter of his stepmother as his new wife and care-provider. So for the next year, his business appears to have been continuing smoothly; but the number of surviving copies of Dinmore's paper shrinks steadily for those numbers he issued later that year, suggesting that he reduced the paper's quantity rather than its frequency to keep the venture going in 1806.

Sometime after June 1, 1807, Dinmore suspended publication of the five-year-old *Expositor* to reorganize his entire business. When the journal reappeared in mid-November, the thrice-weekly *Alexandria Expositor* had become the weekly *Washington Expositor*. Dinmore had moved his press back across the Potomac to Washington proper in the interim, placing his office much closer to his G Street home. Testimony from a later biography suggests that his strength was slowly evaporating now in a losing battle with cancer. Within six weeks of restarting his paper, Dinmore brought in William Cooper, another District bookseller, as his managing partner; after a year together, the partners closed the *Expositor* permanently to focus on book and job-printing alone; and after another year, the two dissolved their firm and went their separate ways in early 1810. For Dinmore, this dissolution meant taking a job as "a clerk in the public offices" in Washington, clearly a reduction in his standing in the city – one tied to his declining health.

When Dinmore finally succumbed to his "cancerous complaint" in September 1811, he was already a footnote to the city's publishing history. His contemporaries reported his passing in their papers with simple one-sentence notices, eschewing any larger comment on his life and works. One of his surviving friends in the trade – probably one of the District's major

booksellers: Roger C. Weightman, Richard Milligan, or James D. Westcott – took exception to this slight; two weeks after his death, that friend published an expensive, half-page-long biography of Dinmore in the *National Intelligencer*, one stressing his learning, humanity, and dedication to solid Republican principles. Still, that lengthy paean did little to pull his reputation out from under the shadow of that of his notorious former partner, as this era's historians have long demonstrated in their focus on Lyon rather than on Dinmore.

Personal Data

Born: Dec. 8 1765 Norwich, Norfolk County, England
Married [1]: in 1788 Jane Shreeve @ Norwich, England (d. 1804)
Married [2]: Aug. 28 1806 Bridget Oliver @ Baltimore, Maryland
Died: Sept 26 1811 Washington City, District of Columbia

Reportedly had sixteen children; one unnamed daughter survived into adulthood; an English-born son died in United States.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Rawson, "Guardians," chap. 6; Bryan, *National Capital*; Austin, *Matthew Lyon*; notices in *Washington Centinel of Liberty*, 1799-1801; *National Intelligencer*, 1801-13; *Alexandria Expositor & Washington Expositor*, 1802-09; commentaries in *Alexandria Advertiser*, 1804-09; biography in *National Intelligencer*, 8 Oct 1811.