

148 DOW, LORENZO – [REV. LORENZO DOW]

Publisher

Richmond, Lynchburg

Methodist itinerant who published religious tracts in Richmond and Lynchburg in 1804 and in Lynchburg again in 1812; also the brother-in-law of Benjamin Dolbeare (142).

Dow is not strictly a Virginia figure, but his use of Virginia presses to advance an evangelical ministry obliges his inclusion in this index. Described by many contemporaries as either eccentric or deranged, Dow was a shrewd promoter of his unique theological perspectives. He often used printers near to the locales of his revival meetings to produce new editions of previously published works, so reinforcing his message among his hearers with cheap local imprints, just as George Whitfield had during his American travels a century before.

Born in Connecticut during the Revolutionary War, Dow had an early interest in religious ideas, after having had several "visions" during his adolescent years. By eighteen, he had applied to preach on Methodist circuits in New England, but was sent home repeatedly for both his unorthodox theology and his enthusiastic style of preaching. On his own initiative, Dow set out to convert Catholics in Canada in 1798 and thence to Ireland in 1799. With his return, he was relegated to his former unordained status and dispatched on circuit in New York and Vermont. Dismayed by his superiors' lack of vision, he set out on his own initiative again for the South in January 1802; over the next two years he traversed the region from Savannah to the Mississippi on foot, preaching to any group that would hear him.

In 1804, Dow made his first appearance in Virginia, employing for the first time the camp-meeting style of ministry, stirring up much controversy among conservative Episcopalians and Presbyterians in the process. To aid this effort, Dow published variant editions of his first published work, *The Chain of Lorenzo* – one in Richmond from the press of Samuel Pleasants (331) and another in Lynchburg from the press of John Weaver (433). Often called *Lorenzo's Thoughts*, this tract was originally published in Augusta, Georgia, in 1803 and was eventually issued in more than thirty separate editions over the next three decades.

That same year, Dow challenged Methodist leaders by preaching in Baltimore during the meeting of the church's General Conference there, instigating an order to the churches in the New York Conference to bar their doors to the "erratic" preacher who had once visited them regularly. Still, the order did little to deter Dow, as he now embarked on a series of ambitious journeys, starting with a return trip to England and Ireland in 1806-07; once back in America, Dow walked from New England to Louisiana twice, spending most of 1809 along the Gulf coast, before going home to New England in 1811.

In 1812, Dow returned to Virginia and spent much of the following two years there and in adjacent Maryland and North Carolina. On his previous trip, he had evidently made the acquaintance of Samuel Kennedy Jennings (236) in Lynchburg. Jennings was a man of many interests being, at once, the editor of the *Lynchburg Press* (1809-15), a practicing physician, and a Methodist minister. Subsequently, he contributed a medical commentary to Dow's religiously-focused domestic manual, *The Married Lady's Companion*, published in New York in 1808. Now, Dow employed the press of Jennings's partners – Jacob Haas (196) and John

F. Lamb (259) – to publish two entirely new works. The smaller of the two was his *Dialogue between Two Characters; Curious and Singular!!* – an imprint that was reprinted frequently thereafter, starting with an edition published in Winchester the following year. But more impressively, that press issued his 250-page opus attacking Deistic attitudes: *A Journey from Babylon to Jerusalem or The Road to Peace and True Happiness; prefaced with an essay on the Rights of Man*. It was the most substantial imprint that Haas & Lamb ever produced; it was also the only edition of that title issued separately from Dow's other works; later versions are found only in collections of the divine's writings. Yet, these were the last works published initially in Virginia, as all subsequent publications of Dow's work were reprints of previously published titles. He now utilized job-printing firms in New York and Philadelphia for his original works, alongside the small rural presses who reprinted them later.

The result of this whirlwind of preaching and publishing was an ever increasing annoyance with his style and theological views in the North, while Southern audiences, especially in the interior, found Dow a convincing and exemplary clergyman. Twice, he was sued for libelous utterances, first in Charleston, South Carolina in 1821, and then in Troy, New York, in 1829; both events provided him an opportunity to issue a new tract trumpeting his victory over those who would keep the people from hearing the unfiltered word of God.

His wife Peggy was a supporting actor in his dramatic sermonizing, providing much of the musical accompaniment, and even publishing a collection of hymns suitable for Dow's camp meetings. But her death in 1819 slowed his itinerant travels; he continued them at a more relaxed pace after his second marriage, covering less ground each year than he had before her passing, as evinced by his annual stays at the home of his new wife's brother, Benjamin Dolbeare in Clarksburg. Still, his impact was clearly wide spread, as is seen in the number of nineteenth-century men who were named after him, including a brother of the Mormon leader, Brigham Young. Dow was a man well-suited for the revivalistic sensibilities of rural America the early 1800s.

At the end of his life, Dow was turning his attention toward the evil of slavery, seeing its inherent materialism as detrimental to the spiritual life of true Christians. His views were not abolitionist, per se, but rather insisting that each individual make peace with his God on that complex subject. Thus Dow is not mentioned when religious leaders in the antislavery movement are considered now, even as he openly questioned the institution's existence. Rather Dow is remembered for the religious enthusiasm that traditional clergymen found so disconcerting and threatening. And he was still preaching in that style, albeit less frequently, when the seventy-seven year-old minister died just outside Washington in 1834.

Personal Data

Born: Oct. 16 1777 Coventry, Connecticut.
Married [1]: Sept. 3 1804 Peggy Holcombe @ Coventry, Conn. (d. 1819)
Married [2]: April 1 1820 Lucy Dolbeare @ Coventry, Connecticut.
Died: Feb. 2 1834 Georgetown, District of Columbia.
Children: One daughter by Peggy: Letitia Johnson Dow (b. 1805).

Sources: Imprints; Sprague, *Annals* (Methodist); Sellers, *Lorenzo Dow*.