

152 DUNLAP, JOHN

Printer

Richmond

Partner with James Hayes (207) in firm that held the public-printing concession (1780-86).

John Dunlap was an Irish émigré who found remarkable success in Philadelphia. At age ten, he was sent to train as a printer in the press office of his uncle, William Dunlap. When John reached his majority, William retired from the printing-trade to follow a long-suppressed ministerial calling, selling his business to his nephew. Young John struggled to find his niche in Philadelphia over the next few years as he paid off his debt to his uncle. But in 1771 he began publishing a weekly paper – *The Pennsylvania Packet* – that made him solvent and so provided a foundation for his subsequent ventures. The most significant of those was his service as printer to the Continental Congresses that met in Philadelphia from 1774 to 1788. Hence, his most often noted accomplishment is that as publisher of the original broadside edition of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. But it was the association he developed with Thomas Jefferson then that brought him the public-printing contract in Virginia.

Dunlap's first involvement with Jefferson came when the printer published *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* for Jefferson in 1774, which was continued by their 1776 collaboration in printing the Declaration in broadside. Jefferson returned to Virginia that fall to draft his wide-ranging revision of the state's colonial laws while serving in the General Assembly. In 1779, he was elected governor of the Commonwealth, and set out to move the capital from Williamsburg to Richmond. In the process, he discovered that the two existing Virginia printing offices were not up to the particular tasks he had in mind for the state's public printer. After making a short-term reassignment of the state's public work to the new Richmond office of John Dixon (140) and Thomas Nicolson (315) in early 1780, Jefferson contacted Dunlap in Philadelphia, asking that he bring his successful operation to Virginia.

In the subsequent negotiations, Dunlap soon discovered that Jefferson intended to bring any newspaper produced by the state's public printer under tighter government control than had been seen previously. Evidently, Dunlap did not care to embrace such restrictions while also relinquishing his profitable journal in Philadelphia. He countered Jefferson's offer with a proposal that he send James Hayes, a former apprentice who was then his partner in an Annapolis press office, to Richmond to conduct a new office there as the firm of Dunlap & Hayes. Jefferson and his Council of State accepted Dunlap's offer after some debate, though maintaining the restrictive conditions on any paper that Hayes might issue. Thus did Dunlap become Virginia's public printer without ever living in the Commonwealth.

The Dunlap & Hayes operation was, however, hamstrung throughout its six-year existence. Hayes promptly gathered the needed materials in Philadelphia and set out for Virginia, only to lose all of them to the British when the ship carrying those materials went aground in the Chesapeake; by the time Hayes got a replacement office to Richmond, he had to remove it to Charlottesville to avoid another total loss to the British when an arm of Lord Cornwallis's army swept through Virginia in the spring of 1781. When Hayes finally started work in the capital that fall, it was a full year later than anticipated; moreover, the new firm's patron was out of office and under investigation for his conduct during the British invasion. As a

result, the promised compensation for the loss of the original Dunlap & Hayes press went unpaid, while payments for the work that Hayes actually produced lagged badly. By 1785, the printer was under investigation for shortfalls stemming from the company's indebted state and Dunlap was being pressured to come to Richmond to rectify the situation. He chose to remain in Philadelphia, leaving Hayes to face the Assembly's questioning alone. They created a new set of conditions under which every public printer was expected to act and Hayes was soon found derelict in his duty under those new, arbitrary conditions. Hence, the public concession was withdrawn from the Dunlap & Hayes firm in May 1786. The pair dissolved their concern in short order, with Hayes remaining in Richmond to conduct a job-printing office and manage a plantation across the James River from Richmond owned by his formerly-widowed wife. Meanwhile, Dunlap continued with his successful Philadelphia business, quietly absorbing the losses generated by this unfortunate Virginia venture.

Dunlap finally retired from the printing trade in 1795, cashing out his considerable assets to establish a comfortable retirement. However, he found more solace in alcohol than in his wealth, and so drank himself to death in 1812 – a dubious end for so celebrated a figure.

Personal Data

Born:	In	1747	Strabane, County Tyrone, Ireland.
Married	In	1773	Elizabeth Hayes Ellison @ Philadelphia, Penn.
Died:	Nov. 27	1812	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
Children:	Two sons: James (b. 1778), and John (b. 1784).		

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Rawson, "Guardians," chap. 5; *American National Biography*.