

154 DUNNAVANT, MARVEL W.

Printer, Publisher Petersburg

Printer who conducted a job-printing office in Petersburg from 1815 to 1824, with Samuel Dillworth (138) in 1815 and with Thomas W. Lorrain (270) in 1817; also publisher of *The American Star* (1817-18) there, first with Lorrain, then with John H. Perkins (323).

Dunnivant was apparently a son of Petersburg, as were his first two partners. So he likely learned the printing trade there, although he may also have trained in the Raleigh, North Carolina, press office of Joseph Gales, as Thomas Lorrain did. His first business venture was a simple job-printing one in partnership with Samuel Dillworth; established in the spring of 1815 as the War of 1812 came to an end, their business was quickly challenged by the loss of their press in the Great Petersburg Fire of July 1815; the two reconstructed the shop that fall, but Dillworth left their arrangement in 1816 to join Charles Keemle (246) in conducting a similar office in Norfolk. Dunnivant continued the business alone, evidently reputably, as he was engaged in the summer of 1816 to print the long-delayed final volume of *The History of Virginia* by John Daly Burk (063), succeeding Petersburg's John Dickson (134) and Edward Pescud (321) in that role.

In the spring of 1817, Dunnivant set out to publish a new Republican journal, as an addition to his successful job-printing concern. To do so, he formed a partnership with Thomas W. Lorrain; he was a Petersburg native, son to a father of the same name, who was tiring of his situation in Columbia, South Carolina, where he published the thrice-weekly *Telescope*. Dunnivant apparently convinced him to sell the *Telescope* and return to his hometown to assist in producing *The American Star*, another thrice-weekly; their new journal issued its first number in June 1817. However, Lorrain stayed with Dunnivant just four months before leaving Petersburg again, this time seeking fresh opportunities in New Orleans, where his older brother Edwin was the port's naval officer. Dunnivant conducted a hurried search for an experienced replacement, settling on John H. Perkins, who appears to have been a journeyman trained in Boston. Perkins joined the office that December, but he too proved a foot-loose choice; by April, he had decided to move on to Milton, North Carolina, to start his own weekly there. These disruptions sharply limited patronage for Dunnivant's paper; so he closed the *Star* about April 18, 1818, rather than risk another short-term partner.

This short-lived paper was not the last journal Dunnivant attempted; indeed, he proposed publishing at least four more during his lifetime, though only one of those came to fruition. By 1821, he had circulated proposals for two very different journals, both on a weekly pace he could maintain alone. In October 1818, Dunnivant advertised for subscribers to a new "Literary and Miscellaneous Paper" to be called *The Eye, by Oliver Optic, Esq.* His efforts on its behalf seem substantial, as a subscription form was found in 1938 in the personal papers of James Madison; but that proposed paper never issued. In the fall of 1820, he was seeking subscriptions for a new, non-partisan, agricultural weekly entitled the *Columbian Cultivator*; that paper also never issued, even though it was advertised widely in the western reaches of Virginia and North Carolina where its focus should have been popular.

His third proposal succeeded; however, it took Dunnivant away from Petersburg. In early

fall 1824, he moved his office to Warrenton, North Carolina, northeast of Raleigh; there he issued the first number of his new twice-weekly *Warrenton Reporter* on October 22nd, six-and-a-half years after his previous effort. His original intent in starting the *Reporter* was to support the candidacy of William H. Crawford that year, but by the time of its appearance, Crawford had withdrawn from the campaign in poor health, and Dunnivant had converted it to a Jacksonian one. With that position, the paper was more successful than had been his old *Star*, surviving until about 1845. Yet how long Dunnivant was associated with the paper is unclear, given the dearth of surviving issues; but it appears he continued with it through 1827, and perhaps until early 1831, when Robert N. Verrell appears as its publisher.

By March 1832, Dunnivant was back in Petersburg; evidently, he had left his apparatus in Warrenton with Verrell, as he announced that he had purchased the press used by Edward Pescud to publish his *Old Dominion*, the successor to his earlier *Petersburg Republican*. The aging Pescud had finally retired from journalism a year earlier and Dunnivant now wanted to use this dormant press to issue another Jacksonian paper, the thrice-weekly *Petersburg Messenger*. But as he had experienced previously, this proposal too failed to find sufficient support to start publication. It would prove to be his last attempt at publishing.

Sometime in the following three years, Dunnivant moved to Ohio with his wife Eliza. In June 1835, he announced the opening of a "blacking manufactory" in Columbus, a factory that made a preservative polish for cast-iron stoves and ornamental ironwork much like printing ink. The new venture seems to have required all of his accrued wealth, as his wife immediately began advertising a dressmaking business in the city's papers as well. Whether the investment the couple made was worth the changes in their lives that this project had dictated was almost certainly something they could never assess, for just nine months later, in February 1836, Dunnivant died at the relatively young age of forty-three; wife Eliza's fate remains undiscovered.

Personal Data

Born:	In	1793	In Virginia, probably Henrico County.
Married	Apr. 5	1825	Eliza J.B. Stiner @ Mecklenburg County, Virginia.
Died:	Feb. 28	1836	Columbus, Ohio.
Children:	No record of children yet found.		

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Library of Congress Serial Index; Wyatt, *Petersburg*; advertising notices in *Richmond Enquirer*, 1818-36, the *American Beacon* (Norfolk), 1818-20, the *Ohio State Journal and Columbus Gazette*, 1835-36.