

## 173 FOWLER, WILLIAM

**Publisher**

**Alexandria**

Publisher of the *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette* in 1800.

Fowler is a difficult person to trace given a relatively common name; Virginia at the start of the nineteenth century evinces several men with that name, the result of Fowler ancestors arriving there in the 1630s. Circumstances here suggest that this William Fowler was a close relative to the John Fowler (172) also associated with Ellis Price (342), the proprietor who sold him the *Columbian Mirror* in September 1800.

This Fowler was a merchant in Alexandria before he was a publisher there, reportedly running a dry-goods store. He acquired the *Columbian Mirror* from its founder, Ellis Price. A merchant there as well, Price conducted the paper with a series of practical printers as his partner from November 1792. He had sold the business to the last of those partners, Henry Gird (181) in February 1798, who conducted the office alone; but lacking proper business skills, Gird was forced to sell the office and paper back to Price in December 1799, although retaining the right to collect its outstanding debts. In just nine months, Price too was forced out of business, again, burdened with a considerable backlog of accounts receivable. Fowler took on the *Mirror* under the same conditions that Price had taken it from Gird: he acquired the equipment and subscriber list, leaving debt collection to the former owner.

In his first issue on September 16, 1800, Fowler laid out ambitious plans for his newspaper's future. While his "contracted resources" limited his ability in the short term, he announced his intention to convert the thrice-weekly paper into a daily one "should it be found that [his subscribers] are disposed to patronize his plan." But he soon found that converting the paper was the least of his worries. As had Ellis and Gird before him, Fowler offered a paper that tried to walk a middle course between the Federalist and Jeffersonian extremes of the day; and with Jefferson about to ascend to the presidency, a plethora of new journals of each partisan view were announced as forthcoming in the capital district. At the start of December, he sold the office to one of those new proprietors: Samuel Snowden (393), an Alexandria job-printer originally from New Jersey, and Matthew Brown (057), then an editor of the aggressively partisan *Federal Gazette* in Baltimore. Fowler's last number of the *Mirror* issued on Monday December 8th; on Wednesday December 10th the new daily *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer* appeared in its place. In that initial issue Fowler reported that he had abandoned the *Mirror* for the same reason that Price and Gird had, the "irregular manner in which the greater part of the debts due to this office have been received." Together with his notice, Snowden and Brown disclaimed any responsibility for Fowler's accounts.

The sale evidently did not improve Fowler's financial situation. In August 1801, he named his father as his collection agent and removed from Alexandria. He remained in Fairfax County, but now distanced himself from its daily commercial life. His withdrawal may also have been occasioned by failing health. Fowler died in November 1811, though no one in Alexandria took immediate notice; on the last day of 1811, Snowden inserted a short death notice in his paper, noting that he had "possessed a more strong and penetrating mind"

that few could match. Unfortunately, that mind could not best unpaid subscriptions.

***Personal Data***

Died: November 1811 Fairfax County, Virginia.

No further personal information yet discovered.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; notices in *Columbian Mirror* (1799-1800), *Alexandria Advertiser*, later *Alexandria Gazette* (1801-11).