

## 174 FRAYSER, JOHN

**Bookbinder & Bookseller**

**Petersburg, Norfolk, Richmond**

Bookseller and bookbinder in Petersburg (1811-15), initially with William Lownes (271); in Norfolk (1816); and in Richmond (after 1816), initially with Frederick A. Mayo (284).

Frayser has left a sparse trace in the trade based on bookplates and newspaper notices; the bulk of the advertising came from his business partnerships; surviving bookplates indicate his work independent of those associations. His origins are difficult to discern; two larger Frayser family networks existed in Virginia ca. 1800, one centered in Buckingham County and another in New Kent County; both descended from a Scottish progenitor who arrived in Virginia in 1700. Given this Frayser's first appearance as a bookbinder in Petersburg, he was likely trained there, and so probably a part of the nearby Buckingham line.

Frayser's initial trade presence came in December 1811 when William Lownes took him into partnership in the Petersburg firm of Lownes & Frayser. Their Bolling-Brook Street shop was a bindery that sold books as a side line to their core business. The alliance continued until 1813, when Frayser apparently became only a part-time binder as a result of military service during the War of 1812. That service in the First Regiment of the Virginia Militia, under Col. Charles Yancey, took Frayser to Norfolk, where he evidently bound books there on occasion.

At war's end, Frayser returned briefly to Petersburg before moving on to a new partnership in Richmond with Frederick Mayo. Mayo set up shop in Richmond in late 1814 after a brief association in Staunton with Philip DuVal (155) in the short-lived *The Observer* there. Both Mayo and DuVal were a part of the planned dissolution of Samuel Pleasants's office by John M. Burke (065). In early 1815, Mayo partnered with DuVal to buy Pleasants's extensive bookstore and bindery from his estate, which was administered by his widow, Deborah Whitehead Lownes Pleasants (328), sister of Frayser's former partner. Frayser had worked for Pleasants as well before going to Petersburg; so when DuVal finally pulled out of the Burke project in April 1816, Frayser was already known in the Pleasants circle in Richmond; Duval sold him his half-interest in the bookstore and bindery and moved on to other independent business in the capital.

Frayser remained a partner to Mayo for just over a year. After that, he apparently settled into a subordinate role in the bindery shops of other proprietors there; indeed, the only trace of Frayser in public records after 1817 are found in city directories and the federal decennial census, as he no longer advertised his trade services. It also seems that Frayser ceased being a head-of-household after the 1840 census was taken and ceased practicing his trade after Richmond's 1859 directory was issued, those being his last appearances in either record. Tracing his family also becomes difficult after 1819, the result of the many Fraysers that appear in city and county records thereafter. Hence, little more can be said of this Frayser until more definitive evidence is uncovered.

***Personal Data***

Born: ca. 1792 In Virginia (Buckingham County?)  
Married ca. 1820 Unknown.  
Died: after 1859 Probably in Richmond, Virginia.  
Children: Federal census indicates three children, two sons & one daughter.

Sources: MESDA Index nos. 12259, 22156, 48708; Hubbard on Richmond; advertising notices in *Petersburg Intelligencer* (1811-15), and Richmond *Virginia Argus* (1816-17); Richmond city directories (1819-59); federal decennial census (1820-40).