

177 GALLAHER, JOHN S.

Printer, Publisher, Editor Martinsburg, Harper's Ferry, Charlestown, Richmond, Winchester

Printer trained in Martinsburg under John Alburtis (004), a journeyman in Charlestown for Richard Williams (447), publisher of *Virginia Free Press* at Harper's Ferry and Charlestown (1821-35); editor and publisher of the *Richmond Compiler* (1835-36); editor and publisher of *Richmond Whig* (1837-40) and *The Yeoman* (1840), a Whig campaign paper at Richmond.

Most of Gallaher's career in the print trade took place after 1820, but his journalistic roots were set early in his life in the Shenandoah Valley. In 1809, then not yet fourteen, he began a five-year-long apprenticeship with John Alburtis, founding publisher of the *Berkeley and Jefferson Intelligencer*, soon to become the *Martinsburg Gazette*. In spring 1814, Gallaher moved to Baltimore to work as a journeyman in the office of Hezekiah Niles, publisher of the *Weekly Register* there; that association lasted but a few weeks, however, as Gallaher was soon called back to Charlestown to manage the office of Richard Williams, publisher of the *Farmers' Repository*, while he served in one of the Virginia militia units sent to guard Norfolk during the British invasion of the Chesapeake that summer.

During that residence, Gallaher made his first mark politically by publishing a lengthy mock-heroic poem about an uproarious Federalist celebration in nearby Shepherdstown over the abdication of Napoleon earlier that spring; "The Cossack's Celebration" was reprinted in Republican papers elsewhere and then issued as a pamphlet in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, that fall. Yet his new-found influence quickly ended; he too was called to militia service in August 1814 to defend Washington during the infamous British assault on the capital city and so remained stationed near there for the duration of the war. At war's end, he joined the staff in the *National Intelligencer* office conducted by the noted Republican journalists Joseph Gales, Jr. (1786-1860) and William Winston Seaton (373), working there until at least 1817. In early 1819, he proposed opening his own newspaper – *The Centinel of Freedom* – in Rockville, Maryland, north of the capital district; but he evidently sold his interest in the venture that summer to the paper's eventual founder, John Webber, and returned to Charlestown to work for Williams again.

In late 1820, Gallaher began circulating a proposal to publish another weekly in Jefferson County: the *Free Press* at Harper's Ferry. The journal made its first appearance the following May, with Gallaher working in tandem with his younger brother Robert as the firm of J. & R. Gallaher. That pairing would last only until August 1821, when Robert died "of a malignant fever then prevailing." Gallaher continued the paper by adding new unnamed partners to the venture as John S. Gallaher & Co. It may be that those partners were also family members, as his brothers Horatio and James would eventually become active participants in the *Free Press*; moreover, all three of his brothers appear to have been trained in the Charlestown press office of Richard Williams, and their new-found trade-skills may have induced his return to the area in 1819 so as to lead a family business. This new foundation allowed Gallaher to expand his business in 1824 to include a weekly literary paper aimed at the region's female readers: *The Lady's Garland*. It proved to be the first successful female-

oriented paper in Virginia.

With the success of his two Harper's Ferry weeklies, however, Gallaher now undermined the stability of his old mentor's *Farmers' Repository* in Charlestown. By late 1826, Williams was looking for a way to divest himself of his two-decade-long burden; Gallaher would be that way out. In the winter of 1826-27, the two publishers came to an agreement to merge their newspapers into a single entity. It was a culmination of Gallaher's attempts to increase his visibility and influence. Just before commencing the *Lady's Garland*, he proposed moving his existing Harper's Ferry paper to Fredericksburg under the new title of the *Virginia Free Press*, so expanding its regional perspective to state-wide one. When that plan failed, he established the literary adjunct in order to build up the political credibility of his original *Free Press*; the *Garland* allowed Gallaher to reduce that paper's literary content in favor of added political matter, while retaining and expanding an essential element of his office's customer base. And when Williams began looking for a successor, Gallaher had offered his *Free Press* for sale in order to finance the acquisition of Williams's weekly. But by merging the two, instead of selling either one, Gallaher forged a powerful new political voice in the northern valley, one that opposed the candidacy of Andrew Jackson in the forthcoming 1828 election, and so became one of Virginia's earliest Whig journals.

The new *Virginia Free Press & Farmers' Repository* made its first appearance in March 1827, issued from Charlestown, with Gallaher's brother Horatio as his partner in the firm of J. S. & H. N. Gallaher. Still it took a suspension of the *Lady's Garland* (February to May 1827) to accomplish the merger. Remarkably, Horatio retained an association with the journal for far longer than brother John did; he was still its "senior editor" at his death in 1883.

The political Gallaher now moved to use the combined paper as a vehicle for his election to public office. He closed the *Garland* in June 1828 to focus on the presidential campaign that fall. After a brief dalliance in proposing a Baltimore paper that would have advocated for railways and canals (*The Locomotive Engine*), Gallaher was elected to Virginia's House of Delegates in 1830; he would serve as one of Jefferson County's two representatives through 1834. His attendance at the Assembly brought him into the realm of Richmond journalism; and in February 1835, he was convinced by James C. Walker to assist in his purchase of the venerable *Richmond Daily Compiler*; their partnership lasted only until June when Walker sold his interest in the paper to William H. Davis. The succeeding firm of Gallaher & Davis was, however, strained by the election of 1836, with Davis demanding the paper's neutrality in the face of Gallaher's emerging Whig sentiments; so he sold his half-interest to Davis in November 1836 and moved on. In short order, Gallaher acquired a one-third interest in the *Richmond Whig*, that party's principal voice in Virginia, begun by John Hampden Pleasants (330) in 1824. He was that journal's chief editor until early 1840 when he commenced publishing a Whig campaign newspaper, *The Yeoman*, one which initially supported John Tyler before shifting to William Henry Harrison once Tyler became Harrison's running mate. With their election secured that November, Gallaher proposed turning the *Yeoman* into a permanent political paper, but found little support to continue it. So he closed the paper in December, returning to Charlestown and the *Virginia Free Press*.

Once back in Jefferson County, Gallaher resumed his political career, using his old *Virginia*

Free Press, still conducted by his brother, to effect his election to the House of Delegates in 1842 and 1843, and then to the Virginia Senate from 1844 to 1847. In departing Richmond though, the editor had left behind his son, Robert H. Gallaher (1821-95), as an editorial assistant in the *Whig* office. In January 1843, his son became editor and proprietor of the *Winchester Republican*, that town's established Whig weekly; the son conducted that paper until late June 1845 when he was summoned back to Richmond to take on the role of that paper's lead partner on the retirement of Alexander Moseley (1807-81) from that function, so compelling him to sell the Winchester paper.

Remarkably, the elder Gallaher saw this moment as a perfect opportunity for him to return to journalism, and so have a direct hand in promoting the agenda he was then advancing in the General Assembly; consequently, he bought the *Winchester Republican* from his son; in doing so, he gave the Gallaher family control over three of Virginia's most influential Whig journals at a time when that party's conflict with Jacksonian Democrats reached its peak. The combined capability of those papers gave Gallaher the leverage needed to have laws enacted by the Assembly that brought railroads into the northern valley, an improvement the *Republican* had long advocated. They also gave him the ability to push a law through that body mandating the establishment of public schools in Jefferson County as a prototype for an eventual state-wide system. But that mandate brought him defeat at the polls in 1848, when his constituents failed to recognize the need for the increased taxes that public education requires. Still, Gallaher would continue to privately support the twenty-seven schools established in the county under this law until the outbreak of the Civil War.

Despite this individual set-back, the Gallaher family's newspapers helped to elect another Whig candidate to the presidency that same year. Yet that success brought an end to John Gallaher's journalism career. In October 1849, the new president, Zachary Taylor, appointed him to the position of Third Auditor in the U.S. Treasury Department; that posting meant that Gallaher was obliged to move to Washington, so compelling him to sell the *Winchester Republican*. Accordingly, Gallaher bid farewell to his many patrons in the issue of February 16, 1850, transferred control of the weekly to the concern of George E. Senseney (his future son-in-law) and Charles A.B. Coffroth, and left Winchester for his new assignment.

Gallaher held this post in the Treasury Department until April 1858 when Franklin Pierce replaced him with a political friend. But the controversy that ensued in Congress over his removal led to an appointment in the office of the Quartermaster General of the War Department, the same office that he had audited while with the Treasury Department.

His role in the federal government, as well as his known Unionist sensibilities, kept Gallaher from returning to Jefferson County for the duration of the ensuing Civil War. Furthermore, his laudable performance in that position during the war kept Gallaher in that post until shortly before his death in Washington in February 1877. His body was returned to his beloved Jefferson County for burial within sight of the Potomac.

The Gallaher family was prominent in Virginia journalism throughout the antebellum period. As noted above, Horatio Nelson Gallaher remained a key figure in their *Virginia Free Press* until 1883, long outliving his older brothers Robert (d. 1821) and James (d. 1837), who John

had also brought into the trade. Son Robert conducted the *Winchester Republican* and the *Richmond Whig* in support of (and with the assistance of) his father; he then started the *Richmond Republican* in 1846 with his brother Edward A. Gallaher (who married a daughter of Richard Williams) and his cousin Benjamin E. Gallaher. All three second-generation Gallahers were ardent Whigs and then Unionists, as John was, and so they disappear from Virginia's journalistic record with the start of the Civil War in 1861.

Personal Data

Born: Dec. 3 1796 Martinsburg, Berkeley County, Virginia (WV).
Married Sept. 7 1817 Catherine Shannon @ Washington, D.C.
Died: Feb. 4 1877 Washington, District of Columbia.
Children: At least two sons – Robert H. and Edward A. Gallaher – and probably more offspring.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Cappon; Norona & Shetler; Rice, "West Virginia Printers;" *Aler's History of Martinsburg*; Morton, *Story of Winchester*; Bushong, *Jefferson County*; notices in *National Intelligencer* (1824-31), *Alexandria Gazette* (1826-69), *Richmond Whig* (1835-74), Frederick, Md. papers (1827), *Richmond Enquirer* (1830), and *Virginia Free Press* (1821-39).