

179 GILMOUR, ROBERT

Printer

Norfolk

Master printer in the office of the ill-fated *Virginia Gazette or Norfolk Intelligencer* (1774-75), so employed by William Duncan (151), John Brown (056), and John Hunter Holt (223).

Gilmour was the key tradesman in a scheme to establish the first press office and weekly newspaper in Norfolk in 1774. The project was initiated by William Duncan, a merchant of Scottish origin in the port; he recognized that the existing Williamsburg *Gazettes* were evermore incapable of meeting the demand for advertising space and that the solution to that vexing problem was to publish a mercantile advertiser in that entrepôt. In the summer of 1773, Duncan published notices in the *Virginia Gazette of Purdie & Dixon* of his intent to publish a new weekly paper to be called *The Norfolk Gazette and Virginia Advertiser*. Those notices stressed that the paper would publish "nothing but what may be really useful and entertaining" so indicating his – and likely his peers' – annoyance with the increasingly politicized content of the three Williamsburg weeklies. Duncan then set off for Britain to acquire a press and the journeymen to operate it, while associates collected subscriptions in Virginia. When he returned in early 1774, Duncan brought with him an entire press office, headed by master-printer Gilmour, who retained ownership of the press itself, and two journeymen, Alexander Cameron (076), Donald McDonald (286), all loyal Scotsmen.

On June 9, 1774, the first Virginia newspaper published outside of Williamsburg issued from Gilmour's press, now entitled *The Virginia Gazette or Norfolk Intelligencer*. The change in name was an assertion of an official authority for the journal in light of the increasingly unofficial direction of its Williamsburg competitors. Yet in doing so, all four men, like many of their Scottish brethren there, found themselves on the wrong side of the political divide emerging in America; most revolutionary leaders in Virginia viewed the port-town as a "damned nest of Tories" and so closely monitored the activities of immigrant merchants and craftsmen. In January 1775, Duncan ran afoul of local efforts to enforce trade restrictions that were part of the Continental Association of 1774, one of the first measures of resistance to imperial authority authorized by the Continental Congress. Duncan was forced to yield control of his office and paper to another merchant, one John Brown, even as Gilmour remained owner of the press. Brown did not long control the journal either, as he was found guilty of importing slaves in violation of the Association's ban on such in March 1775. By that time, patriot leaders had arranged for a new proprietor to take over the *Intelligencer*, someone whose politics were more to their liking. They brought in one John Hunter Holt, son of the patriot printer of New York, who had once been a Williamsburg merchant. Gilmour, Cameron, and McDonald were now employed producing a journal that did not reflect their political views.

Holt would not long control the *Intelligencer* either, though he ran afoul of imperial dictates rather than continental ones. Lord Dunmore (153), Virginia's last royal governor, had fled from Williamsburg shortly after Holt arrived in Norfolk, a result of his plan for suppressing the nascent rebellion in Virginia being leaked to a Williamsburg paper; through that summer, Dunmore and his wandering administration operated from ships anchored off

Norfolk, drawing withering commentaries from Holt in his weekly paper. At the end of September 1775, after a particularly coarse assault on the character of one of Dunmore's lieutenants, the governor ordered Holt arrested and his office seized. The governor snared the press alone, but acquired two willing printers for that press in Cameron and McDonald. For the next six months, the two journeymen worked on board a ship in Dunmore's "fleet" off Norfolk, producing job-printing for his "official" government, as well as a newspaper, the *Virginia Gazette*, "printed by Authority," serving Dunmore's need for an official voice.

Gilmour evidently was not present that September day, so was not a part of Dunmore's off-shore press office. His whereabouts over the following months remain uncertain, even as his press can be readily traced from Norfolk in 1775 to New York in 1776 to Philadelphia in 1777. It was used by Cameron and McDonald in service to Sir William Howe, commander-in-chief of British forces in North America, as printers to his army – at Lord Dunmore's specific recommendation. The pair abandoned Gilmour's press in Philadelphia in June 1778 in a ruinous state, simply not worth taking back to New York when Howe evacuated the city; it was thus likely cannibalized by the printers there in need of parts.

At war's end, the Treaty of Paris allowed for a settlement of outstanding debts in America owed to refugee Loyalists. Gilmour had already filed a claim for the press in London in 1782, indicating his departure from America before that date. Even as he cited its last known location as being in the hands of traitorous Philadelphia printers, his claim was rejected by the Lords of the Treasury; they thought it was Gilmour's responsibility to track down his own property in the United States and pursue compensation from its keepers in the courts there. With that decision, Gilmour disappears into the historical mists, lost in a plethora of like-named Scotsmen on both sides of the Atlantic.

No Personal Data yet discovered.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Siebert, "Confiscated Revolutionary Press;" Rawson, "Guardians," chap. 4.