

181 GIRD, HENRY JR. – [HENRY HATTON GIRD II]

Printer & Publisher

Alexandria

Printer and publisher of *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette* (1796-99), initially with its founder Ellis Price (342).

Gird is an interesting figure, as he was both a Royalist refugee who fled the United Irishman troubles of the 1790s and a leader in the craft-union organizations of New York after 1800; between those disparate bookends he was a journalist and printer in Alexandria.

In 1787, Gird was placed in the Dublin office of Robert Marchbank to train as a printer; he left Marchbank and Ireland in 1792 to join a London press office connected with his father's English business interests. In 1793, Henry Gird Sr. liquidated his substantial merchant assets in England and Ireland in order to move his Dublin-based family away from the growing conflict there. That fall, he loaded his wife, fifteen children – including nineteen-year old Henry Jr. – and several indentured servants onto his sole remaining merchant vessel and sailed for Virginia. The family settled in Fairfax County, possibly on the recommendation of George Washington, building grist and starch mills in the countryside around Alexandria and retail businesses in the town proper.

Evidently Henry Jr. found employment quickly in Baltimore's press offices, as in late 1795 he was confident enough in his standing there to propose issuing a new daily newspaper, the *Baltimore Evening Star*; but finding insufficient support for his project, Gird abandoned the effort in February 1796 and moved back to the family base in Alexandria. There he fell in with Ellis Price, a local merchant who had founded the *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette* three years earlier, employing trained printers to produce it for him; in that time, the *Mirror* had become the port town's principal mercantile advertiser and so its primary Federalist voice as well. Gird became Ellis's shop foreman at first and then his partner from November 1796, probably financed by his father. A year later, Price bought Gird's interest in the *Mirror*, though Gird evidently remained in the office as he bought out Price just three months later, suggesting that the exchange was made to clear Henry Sr.'s involvement in their business. Gird then held the *Mirror* on his own until the end of 1799, about thirteen months, before he sold out to Price again. This time, however, Gird left Alexandria for New York City and journeyman work there, having apparently decided that Virginia did not suit his social perspective. During his tenure as the *Mirror's* proprietor, Gird had maintained the paper's Federalist stance, but he also angered some of his Fairfax neighbors by adopting an antislavery attitude in its pages, concurrent with (and so supportive of) ongoing, concerted efforts among Virginia's Quakers, many from Fairfax, to liberalize slave manumission laws in the state. In light of that public response to his private values, New York and its numerous presses now appeared to offer a more secure future for someone as dependent on public patronage as was a publisher like Gird.

In New York, Gird formed a new partnership with Samuel Stanbury, starting a printing house that survived both founders. Over the next decade their press produced numerous works on religious and literary subjects, as well as briefly publishing a literary magazine. Reflecting his ethical values. Gird also married the young widow of a ship captain lost at sea, adopting

her two infant children in the process, a clear exhibition of his charitable instincts. But his most noteworthy social impact came from his association with the New York Typographical Society; originally a simple social club, Gird and a handful of other tradesmen turned the society into a craft-union organization by 1810; their group drew up and enforced payment schedules for press and composition work in the face of efforts by many non-tradesman proprietors in the city to increase their profits at the expense of printers' wages. Gird made sure that his own office was an example of how a press could be operated profitably for the mutual benefit of both owner and worker alike. His success at doing so was marked by his investment in a tavern in Brooklyn in 1806.

Still, the demands of his life and the pace of his labors took their toll on him; after 1810, Gird was reported to be chronically ill, making his death in early 1812 unsurprising. His funeral the following day was well attended by the city's printers and publishers, led by his colleagues in the New York Typographical Society.

Personal Data

Born: In 1773 Wexford, County Wexford, Ireland.
Married ca. 1801 Maria Smith Crane @ New York City, New York.
Died: Mar. 14 1812 Brooklyn, New York County, New York.
Children: Henry III (b. 1802); Richard (b. 1803); John (b. 1807); Mary (b. 1809);
two step-children from his wife's previous marriage.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; *Artisans & Merchants*; Scharf, *Baltimore*; Pollard, *Dublin Book Trade*; Bancroft, *Builders of the Commonwealth*; Lause, *Some Degree of Power*; Stevens, *New York Typographical Union No. 6*; notices in various New York newspapers, 1800-12; genealogical data from Gird family charts posted on USGenWeb and Ancestry.com (October 2012).