

182 GOOCH, C. W. – [COL. CLAIBORNE WATTS GOOCH]

Publisher

Richmond

Publisher of *Richmond Enquirer* (1820-28) as partner to its founder Thomas Ritchie (360).

Gooch was from birth a member of the Virginia elite by the simple convenience of his name; he was a descendant of the family's progenitor William Gooch (1717-62) of Hanover County, but his oft-suggested and assumed descent from royal governor William Gooch (1681-1751) and early colonial secretary William Claiborne (1600-77) remain unproved. It is clear that he was named after his father's uncle, Claiborne P. Gooch, and that he benefitted from the family's extensive connections in the state.

Gooch first came to public notice during the War of 1812, when the young militia officer was appointed as deputy to the state's adjutant general, Moses Green. That service brought him an appointment as Green's successor in 1815 as the war concluded. Gooch continued in that office until March 1821. During his tenure there, Gooch reinforced his elite status by marrying Maria Barnes, a niece of the celebrated Virginia jurist Spencer Roane, as well as a cousin of the Richmond publisher Thomas Ritchie. This connection meant that when Ritchie needed an infusion of capital for his *Enquirer* office in early 1820, he had a marriage relation with such resources close at hand. The then-thirty-year-old Gooch apparently jumped at the chance to join the inner circle of the state's Republican leadership, the so-called Richmond Junto. However, by joining Ritchie and his politicized journal, at just the same time that he became a director of the relatively new (and still controversial) Farmer's Bank of Virginia, Gooch was quickly pressed to relinquish his public post from conflict-of-interest concerns; he resigned the post in March 1821 and dedicated himself to those other endeavors.

The pairing of Gooch and Ritchie was problematic, however. The notorious travel writer and social critic Anne Royall reported that Ritchie's addition of Gooch had subverted the free-thinking, democratic quality of his *Enquirer* to the service of her reviled "blue-backs," those men who would force open public discourse into a set of prescribed religious restraints. Her assessment was not far off it seems, as the partnership did come to an end in late 1828 over political differences between the partners. The conservative Gooch had accepted Ritchie's active campaigning for Andrew Jackson in the *Enquirer* during that election year; but with the presidency won for his champion, Ritchie now wanted their paper to campaign for a state convention to further democratize Virginia's fifty-year-old constitution; Gooch did not support such sweeping changes, so a dissolution of their firm was soon negotiated. John L. Cook (105), one of Ritchie's early journeymen, took Gooch's place at the *Enquirer*, bringing the planter's career as a journalist to an end after eight years.

Gooch retired to his plantation in eastern Henrico County, Airfield, and settled into the role of gentleman farmer, both there and at his satellite plantation called Little Egypt. While continuing as a bank director, he also published essays on farming techniques. He remained a part of the state's partisan elite as well, gladly backing the candidacy of Martin Van Buren in 1836 as an offset to Jackson's presidency. That support brought him an appointment as Richmond's Postmaster in March 1837. That support also made him a candidate for editing a new partisan journal that would challenge Ritchie's *Enquirer* while also taking on the

state's fast-growing Whig faction led by John Tyler of Charles City. The individuals proposing that new paper simultaneously brought financial pressure to bear on Ritchie in an effort to force his bankruptcy; the journalist was once again heavily in debt after having been forced to purchase Cook's interest in his paper after his partner's death in 1836; Gooch evidently thought badly of these strong-arm tactics and so fronted Ritchie at least \$10,000 to fend off the fiscal assault. Hence it is little surprising that the proposed anti-Ritchie journal never came to fruition, and the partisan newspaper war in Virginia was led by Ritchie's Democratic paper and the Whig journal of John Hampden Pleasants (330).

Still, Gooch's overt ties to Van Buren did bring about the end of his public-service career. He was removed as Richmond's postmaster in March 1841, following William Henry Harrison's inauguration. So while still a director of the Farmers' Bank, he spent most of his remaining days at Airfield and not in Richmond. Gooch died there, after a short illness, in April 1844.

Personal Data

Born: June 1 1788 Amherst County, Virginia.
Married in 1818 Maria R. Barnes @ Essex County, Virginia.
Died: Apr. 21 1844 near Richmond, Henrico County, Virginia.
Children: Three sons: Richard Barnes (1820-51); Philip Claiborne (1825-55); and Arthur Fleming (1829-98).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Cappon; Hubbard on Richmond; *Genealogies of Virginia Families*; Ambler, *Thomas Ritchie*; authority files at Library of Virginia and Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; notices in the *Richmond Enquirer* (1814-44); genealogical data from Gooch family charts posted on USGenWeb and Ancestry.com (October 2012), The birth/death dates reported here are consistent with those on his grave and in state records, but not with family genealogies which vary.