

## 189 GRAY, JOHN

**Bookseller & Bookbinder**

**Alexandria**

Proprietor of a large Alexandria bookstore and bindery (1800-12) in partnership with his brother Robert Gray (190).

Gray was one of three brothers engaged in the book-binding and -selling trade in northern Virginia in the early years of the nineteenth century. They were all sons of a Scots-Irish immigrant named William Gray; he had emigrated to Westmoreland County in 1765 before moving on to a farm in Fairfax County near Mount Vernon in 1784; after his death, his widow, Catherine Dick Gray, removed to Alexandria in 1799 to live with her eldest son Robert, bringing young John with her.

Evidently Robert was already engaged in the bindery trade there by that time; it also seems that John had already been trained as a binder as well, but in Philadelphia not Alexandria. With the family's relocation, Robert and John jointly opened a store and bindery in 1799 at the corner of Duke and Fairfax Streets in Alexandria's vibrant business district. For the next eight years, their store was one of the largest book-trade businesses in Virginia, producing vast quantities of blank books alongside the imprints they sold and bound. The bulk of that stock came from associations with the publishing houses in Philadelphia, as well as from connections to Scottish and Irish suppliers.

The end of this successful partnership came as a result of John's withdrawal from the business in June 1808 for reasons unknown. As John died four years later, health issues may have been the cause; it may also be that the family had offered Robert a new assistant in his youngest brother, William Fairfax Gray (192), who was then of an appropriate age for an apprenticeship in 1808, even though he does not appear as an independent entity in the trade until 1815. Still, John's activities over the next four years are uncertain; if he did have a chronic illness, he likely simply retired to his residence in Alexandria. His end came in late 1812, evidently leaving his young family devastated. His widow and daughters soon left the town to live with her relatives in Philadelphia.

### ***Personal Data***

Born:	Oct. 12	1779	Westmoreland County, Virginia.
Married:	ca.	1803	Ann Maria Helmbold of Philadelphia.
Died:	Dec. 7	1812	Alexandria, Virginia.
Children:	Four children; one son & one daughter died young; daughters Eliza and Maria survived parents but never married.		

Sources: Imprints; *Artisans & Merchants*; Raymond, *Gray Genealogy*; notices in Alexandria papers (1800-12).