

## 193 GRAY, WILLIAM WALLER

**Printer & Publisher**

**Richmond, Lynchburg**

Publisher of the *Lynchburg Press* (1810-11), of *The Echo* (1816) at Lynchburg with Russel Dawson (130), and of *The Spirit of Union* (1817) at Richmond with Thomas Burling (066); also journeyman printer in the offices of Samuel Pleasants (331) and the Franklin Press; a nephew of William Waller Hening (213).

Gray was someone who lived on the edge of Virginia's Republican inner circle by virtue of both his family and his employers. His mother was Eleanor (Nellie) Hening (1764-1839), the only sister of William Waller Hening, the noted legal scholar, Chancery Court clerk, and Republican leader in Richmond; his father was Francis Gray (1759-1827), a Revolutionary War veteran who served in the Virginia Line from 1778 to 1782; after the war, the couple settled in Lynchburg, establishing a familial link to that place for their son William.

It seems that Gray was trained in the Richmond press office of Samuel Pleasants, given his later associations with other tradesmen from that office, as well as his working for Pleasants before and during the War of 1812. His first association with such tradesmen came with his first journalistic venture in Lynchburg. Fleming Grantland (185) had commenced publishing the *Lynchburg Press* in May 1809 after leaving the Richmond office of his brother Seaton (186), a former Pleasants journeyman, where he had helped to produce the Madisonian campaign weekly, *The Virginian*, edited by Gerard Banks (019), himself a brother-in-law of Hening. That same spring, Seaton moved his press office to Milledgeville, Georgia, then that state's capital, to produce the pro-Madison *Georgia Journal* there. By the spring of 1810, Seaton had convinced Fleming to join him in Georgia, necessitating the sale of his year-old *Lynchburg Press*; Gray stepped into Grantland's place. Apparently, his proprietorship of the *Press* was also designed as a one-year deal, for Gray did not set up an separate household, living instead with his parents while he worked there; in May 1811, he sold the paper and press to Jacob Haas (196), a printer trained on the Henkel press in New Market, and John F. Lamb Jr. (259), a young doctor from the Lynchburg area, and left town. (Interestingly, Haas married the widow of Seaton Grantland's brother-in-law after buying the *Press*, suggesting a series of familial ties here.) Gray returned to journeyman work in Richmond, and took up military service there during the War of 1812 as a private in the Richmond Volunteers of Capt. Richard Booker.

Gray returned to Lynchburg in early 1816 to start a new Republican newspaper, *The Echo*, with another young printer, Russel Dawson, as his partner. The pair evidently experienced a rough road there, so brought in Gerard Banks (019), a well-known Jeffersonian journalist, to edit their new paper during the election campaign that fall; his association with Dawson & Gray was brief as he was compelled to return to his Fredericksburg home after the death of his wife within a month of his taking up the editorial pen here. Dawson & Gray continued without Banks until the next summer. At the end of the first volume in June 1817, the pair transferred control of *The Echo* to Tubal Early Strange (406), apparently so that Gray could return to Richmond to join his friend and long-time associate, Thomas Burling (066), in publishing a new weekly called *The Spirit of Union*. It proved to be his final professional

parting from Lynchburg, as a subsequent attempt to publish a third paper there, again with Dawson, came to naught in the summer of 1819.

On October 17, 1817, the new firm of Burling & Gray issued the first number of *The Spirit of Union*. Ritchie took note of the accomplishment of his former employees, much as would a proud father, reporting that their journal was "very handsomely printed, and its contents very judicious and interesting." But even such a glowing endorsement did not keep the enterprise from quickly foundering. At \$3.00 per annum, its price was 50 percent more than most weeklies then published, a sum that was supposedly payable in advance. The partners amended their prospectus advertisement in September to note the swift encouragement they had received in reaching the number of subscribers needed to commence publication. Yet it seems that those subscriptions were promises not payments. The *Spirit* issued its last number on December 26th, barely two months after its first; four days later, a notice in the *Enquirer* revealed that their press and office had been seized for non-payment of the note that had financed their operation, and that the whole would be sold at auction just one week hence – Tuesday, January 6, 1818.

On Monday January 5th, Thomas Burling died. Ritchie's obituary for his friend, published on the day of the planned auction, said that "he suddenly bid adieu to all temporal affairs." While Ritchie did not indicate the cause of Burling's death, suicide was likely the reason. It is clear that their journal came to such a quick and tragic end as a result of debt, but what triggered that result is unclear. The partners may have acquired a press from the residue of Pleasants' *Virginia Argus* office earlier that year. That office's original buyer, John M. Burke (065), had foundered as well, sinking his multiple business ventures in a sea of debt; he fled Richmond in January 1817, one step ahead of a debt execution. Thus his creditors were still unpaid, and so likely put a very short date on any promissory note offered as payment for all or part of their security – the equipment of former *Argus* office. Such a suggestion is supported by the subscriber of the published auction notice, Richmond attorney Michael Grantland, a brother of the aforementioned Seaton and Fleming, who was called "trustee" for the note holders. His sale of the *Spirit's* effects proceeded despite Burling's death. After the sale, Gray advertised that he intended to publish the *Spirit* once again, but never did, perhaps because Burling's intestate estate was not settled until late 1818. Yet a year later, Gray was still in town, operating a job-printing office. He had survived the catastrophe, but would never publish a paper of his own again.

Gray's office on the corner of E (now Cary) and 17th streets in Richmond gradually came to be known as the Franklin Press. That depersonalized identity effectively masked those of its owners and workers, but it also seems to have been a conscious attempt to create a press in Richmond without an overt partisan association. Gray apparently held the controlling interest until 1820, with Nathan Pollard (335), a Richmond schoolmaster, slowly emerging as the office's principal after 1820. The non-ephemeral output of the Franklin Press was largely religious in nature, with a few historical and legal titles among its imprints. Its key patron was the Presbyterian evangelical, Rev. John Holt Rice (354), who issued his monthly *Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine* (1818-21) from the Franklin Press. Rice also employed that press for an annual anthology of religious tracts, *The Pamphleteer* (1819-20)

and for several individual treatises.

Still the most enduring products of the Franklin Press were those legal titles commissioned by William Waller Hening, Gray's maternal uncle. Hening had been authorized by an act of the General Assembly in 1808 to compile a complete set of Virginia's colonial laws, most of which had never been published before and so were essentially inaccessible. The finished collection – *The Statutes at Large: being a collection of all the laws of Virginia, from the first session of the legislature, in the year 1619* – would eventually run to thirteen volumes, but only with difficulty. The project was suspended in 1814 with volume IV, in part by the death of its publisher, Samuel Pleasants, and in part by a dearth of the subscriptions needed to fund its publication. When the project resumed in 1819, Gray was contracted to print volumes V (1819), VI (1819), and VII (1820), as well as a reprint of volume IV (1820). The fact that subsequent volumes were produced (1821-23) by the Richmond job-printer George Cochran (097) suggests that Gray retired from his active involvement in print-trade work when he completed those four volumes for his uncle.

Gray was still a young man then, just thirty-two, but his trace on the landscape thereafter is slight, and his principal occupation after the Franklin Press years is unknown. The census of 1820 indicates that he either owned or managed a small plantation in Warwick County (now the city of Newport News) employing seven slaves. But by 1830, Gray was again residing in Richmond. There he became involved in the production and sale of a patented medicine in 1837, "Gray's Invaluable Ointment," which was promoted as a curative for many "external diseases generally." The product was evidently successful and profitable, as Gray renewed his patent in 1848. Two years later, Gray was living in Raleigh, North Carolina, with his wife Mary, though with no other family members; it seems that city had become the site of his medicine-making operation, as his nationally-published advertisements regularly stated that the ointment was "prepared by the patentee" – an extraordinary change in occupation.

Gray is reported to have died in April 1865 in Raleigh as the Civil War drew to a close. But the only evidence found supporting that report is a cenotaph in the Nashville, Tennessee, cemetery where his son and several of his grandchildren are buried. The marker does not mention his years as a printer, only his military service and his invention of a famed patent medicine; the stone also notes that the location of Gray's grave is unknown, likely indicative of the massive war-end disruptions in central North Carolina.

### ***Personal Data***

Born:	May 4	1788	Henrico County, Virginia.
Married:	Jan. 25	1816	Mary Ann Dunlap @ Richmond, Virginia.
Died:	April 5	1865	Raleigh, North Carolina.
Children:	1820 census indicates four sons & three daughters; only known name is William Francis Gray (1824-1908), buried in Nashville.		

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Hubbard on Richmond; War of 1812 Service Records; United States Patent # 8693; notices in Richmond newspapers (1810-21) and Cincinnati newspapers (1837-42); genealogical data from Gray family charts posted on Ancestry.com (October 2012).

Thanks are due to R. Neil Hening of Richmond for the use of his extensive notes on the Hening family generally and the publishing history of *The Statutes at Large* specifically.