

198 HALL, CHRISTOPHER

Bookbinder & Bookseller

Norfolk

Bookbinder and Bookseller in Norfolk from 1817 to about 1846.

Hall was a transplant to Virginia from New York, where he had apprenticed as a bookbinder; that training seemingly came from an affiliation with the publishing firm of Evert Duyckinck & Co. there, given his later marriage to Duyckinck's niece. His arrival in Norfolk at the age of twenty-seven also seems to have been tied to insolvency proceedings in New York; in early 1817, a "Christopher Hall" applied for relief under that state's bankruptcy laws and then left the city once a settlement was negotiated that July; the Hall in Norfolk set up shop there in November 1817, a timing consistent with the insolvent's relocation.

From the start, Hall's business in Norfolk concentrated on the manufacture of blank books, an item vital to the commerce of the port. It was not until he had been in town a year that he advertised stationery items for sale, and another year before he marketed books. While Hall always offered imported books for sale thereafter, his advertised domestic titles were ones issued from New York City presses for nationwide distribution, further evincing a link to the Duyckinck firm. By 1820, he was drawing domestic titles from Boston publishers as well, alongside a few of Philadelphia origin, demonstrating that Hall's business was then fully integrated into the American book-trade network. Still, the foundation of that business was blank-book making, as each of his advertisements noted in an addenda. In May 1819, he even acquired an exclusive license for Norfolk for a patented book-ruling machine to aid that production, advertising the purchase in a newspaper notice that ran fifteen weeks. As a result of that manufacturing focus, his success was not as dependent on book sales as was that of his main competitors in town, Caleb Bonsal (040) and Marcus T.C. Jordan (245).

Over time, Hall's prominence as a merchant translated into a civic recognition. He was often appointed to committees charged with addressing public health issues, particularly when the city experienced one of its many yellow fever outbreaks. That service led to his eventual election to Norfolk's Common Council, alongside the equally respected publisher Thomas G. Broughton (055), as well as to the city's Board of Health. Still, Hall's residence in Norfolk was not without its sorrow; his wife Harriet died there at the end of their first decade in Virginia, leaving him with at least six children under twelve years of age; he turned to his New York roots for aid, marrying in July 1829 someone he evidently knew from his youth there: Sarah Jones, the recently widowed daughter of Evert Duyckinck's younger brother Christopher. The couple proved to be an enduring presence in the port through the rest of Hall's business career. He seems to have retired in about 1846, at age fifty-six, as advertising notices for his business cease at that time. His death in October 1860 was widely noted and mourned, with newspapers as far distant as New Orleans reporting his passing. In all of his obituaries, Hall was described as one of "the most prominent citizens" then living in Norfolk.

Personal Data

Born: In 1791 New York City, New York.
Married [1]: Before 1817 Harriet Webber @ New York City, NY.
Married [2]: July 12 1829 Sarah Duyckinck Jones @ New York City, NY.
Died: Oct. 31 1860 Norfolk, Virginia.
Children: By Harriet (d. by 1828): Caroline (m. 1834), Cynthia A. (b. 1823),
Christopher Jr. (b. 1826), Albert, James.
By Sarah (d. by 1860): Evert Duyckinck (1829-33); Sarah was already
in Norfolk by 1828, as son's birth was 4 months before marriage.

Sources: Imprints; Forrest, *Sketches of Norfolk*; Burton, *Norfolk*; *Duyckinck and Associated Families*; Federal Decennial Census, 1820-50; notices in Norfolk newspaper (1817-46).