

200 HANSON, SAMUEL

Publisher

Alexandria

Publisher of *The Virginia Gazette and Alexandria Advertiser* (1789-93) in partnership with Thomas Bond (039); subsequently publisher of a newspaper in the District of Columbia.

Samuel Hanson was a man "born in affluence, of one of the most distinguished families of Maryland" in 1752. He was a fourth generation descendant of an original settler of the Maryland colony and son of a military hero of the French & Indian War also named Samuel, one of several like-named men then living in Charles County, Maryland. Hanson seems to have had an early acquaintance with George Washington, whose Mount Vernon estate was almost directly across the Potomac from his father's plantation. As a result, Hanson joined Washington's staff in Philadelphia at the start of the Revolutionary War, before resigning his Continental post to accept a Maryland commission as a lieutenant colonel in a Charles County militia regiment, leading that unit in several mobilizations through 1781. At that same time, Hanson sat as a county-court justice from 1779 until 1786 and served as a representative in the Lower House of the Maryland Assembly from 1781 to 1784. But after the war, Hanson's primary focus fell on nearby Alexandria where he recognized opportunity in developing the port's merchant commerce with the interior west; immediately after the war, he ran a dry-goods and forwarding business there with his brother Thomas.

Hanson's shift came at the same time that Thomas Bond moved there from Philadelphia; it seems that the two knew each other from mutual connections in the Philadelphia area, not the least being associations with Washington and his staff, Hanson as a field commander, Bond as head of the primary military hospital there. Bond came to Alexandria at war's end to conduct a land-office, speculating in lands in the area of Morgantown gained through the military bounty warrants that he earned during the war. Both men's infant businesses were dependent on newspaper advertising, and Alexandria lacked a paper when the war ended. Printer George Richards (355) came to Alexandria from Annapolis in 1782 – where he likely knew Hanson as well – and started publishing a mercantile advertiser in 1784, Virginia's first post-war newspaper outside of Richmond. His new office was that of George Richards & Co., indicating the presence of unnamed partners, likely financial backers, probably Hanson and Bond, given subsequent events. The weekly was immediately successful, proving the need for such a journal in northern Virginia. Richards conducted his new *Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser* until his unexpected death in July 1789. A three-week-long suspension ensued, while Hanson joined with to Bond as the firm of Hanson & Bond to buy Richards's press and his *Advertiser*; as neither man was a trained printer, the brevity of the hiatus indicates that the break continued only as long as it took for the new proprietors to find and employ a new printer, suggesting that they had already been Richards's partners.

Both Bond and Hanson would eventually be pulled away from their journalistic venture. Just after the pair took control of the *Advertiser*, Hanson was named the Surveyor of Customs for Alexandria by now-president Washington in the new Federal government, someone he was also then engaged with in land transactions near Alexandria. At that same time, the widower Bond remarried, taking a young Morgantown resident as his new wife. So while

their alliance continued until 1793, Bond had only intermittent contact with their Alexandria office from the start. In 1793, Bond evidently decided to make Morgantown his permanent residence and negotiated a sale of his interest in the *Advertiser* to Hanson; in November, Hanson bought out Bond and moved the weekly and its press office across the Potomac to Georgetown. It reappeared there on December 3rd in twice-weekly form as *The Columbian Chronicle* – an upgrade demonstrating Hanson's commitment to the development of the new national capital district instigated by Washington.

That commitment dictated that Hanson resign from his government post in Alexandria, now being non-resident. He then took on a role in forming the Bank of Columbia in Georgetown as well. That position compelled Hanson to take on managing partners for his newspaper; first came six-month associations with Isaac Briggs (1794) and James Priestly (1794-95) before Hanson reverted to the hired-hand model used in Alexandria; in May 1796, he took on Charles D. Green and David English as partners and recast the *Chronicle* as the *Centinel of Liberty*, an avowedly Federalist journal rather than the mercantile advertiser he previously conducted; that partnership ended in the midst of the Alien & Sedition Acts controversy when Hanson finally retired from journalism in July 1799. The paper continued until January 1802 when Green and English sold it to publishers William Alexander Rind (359) and Charles Prentiss (341), who merged it with their *Washington Federalist* – a journal which began its life as the *Virginia Federalist* in Richmond in 1799.

Hanson's choice to focus on his role as cashier of Bank of Columbia in Georgetown was the first of several that began well but ended badly. He was dismissed from that post by the bank's directors in October 1801 for revealing secret agreements benefitting the bank's merchant customers over the lesser interests of the majority of its depositors; he published an account of the dismissal in the *National Intelligencer*, revealing the ugly dispute as one between the Federalist directors and their Jeffersonian cashier. Remarkably, he then gained an appointment as Washington's sole licensed notary public from President John Adams in the last days of his administration, while Jefferson named him to a seat on the bankruptcy commission for the capital district in June 1802. He evidently resigned both posts in 1804 to accept an appointment as Purser to the Washington Navy Yard; Hanson was dismissed from that post in 1810, once again as a result of challenging his superiors conduct; he spent the next few years petitioning the Congress and the President for both compensation and reappointment. His occupations after 1810 are uncertain, though there are occasional legal notices in the city's papers concerning court suits over property transactions, suggesting he engaged in financing and conveying real estate. It also seems possible that Hanson was the financing behind the businesses of Roger Chew Weightman, a printer trained in the capital's Republican presses (and later mayor of Washington) who married his youngest daughter, Louisa Serena, in May 1814; shortly after Hanson's sacking from the Navy Yard, Weightman opened a bookstore on Pennsylvania Avenue, eventually building a string of stores adjacent to it – a process apparently in line with Hanson's suggested real-estate practice.

Yet, whatever activities that Hanson pursued, they did not allow him to retire from work as he aged. He was recorded in 1827, at the age of seventy-five, as being employed as a clerk in the Office of the First Comptroller at the Department of the Treasury and living at his son-in-law's Washington residence. Weightman's home was also where Hanson died in late

1830. But despite his declining reputation and standing in the capital, the old Revolutionary-era colonel was honored two days later with burial in the Congressional Cemetery.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1752 Port Tobacco Parish, Charles County, Maryland
Married: Apr. 29 1777 Mary Kay @ Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Died: Dec 16 1830 Washington City, District of Columbia.
Children: Maria (b. 1781), Samuel (b. 1786), Isaac Kay (b. 1790), Thomas (b. 1792), Ann (b. 1793), John (b. 1795), Louisa Serena (b. 1799).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; *Artisans & Merchants*; Archives of Maryland authority record; Newman, *Charles County Gentry*; various letters in the *Papers of George Washington*; McMurtrie, *District of Columbia*; Bryan, *History of National Capital*; "R.C. Weightman," *Columbia Historical Society Records* (1909); notices in Alexandria (1786-97), Georgetown (1794-99), and Washington (1810-30) newspapers.