

207 HAYES, JAMES

Printer & Publisher

Richmond

Printer to the Commonwealth (1781-86) as partner to John Dunlap (152), and independent publisher of the semi-official *Virginia Gazette or The American Advertiser* (1781-86).

James Hayes was a trained printer who found fortune once he had departed the trade. He was born in England in about 1759, and had emigrated with his family sometime before 1775. The family, including younger brother John (1760-1822), likely landed in Maryland, given extensive familial connections there afterward. It was in Baltimore that the Hayes brothers first appear in the bibliographic record, both in the employ of Philadelphia printer and publisher John Dunlap. In 1779, Dunlap made James Hayes his partner in a new office in Annapolis, Maryland's capital. There the new firm of Dunlap & Hayes fulfilled the public-printing contract, while Hayes independently issued a semi-official weekly, *The Maryland Gazette and Annapolis Advertiser*. It was a model that Dunlap would repeat in Virginia the following year.

Virginia's printing offices had been ravaged by the wartime environment there, a situation exacerbated by the removal of the state government to Richmond in early 1780. When the standing public printers, John Clarkson (093) and Augustine Davis (119), failed to relocate their press to the new capital, the General Assembly moved to replace them. The governor overseeing the removal, Thomas Jefferson, recommended John Dunlap as a replacement, the tradesman he had worked with in publishing the Declaration of Independence and other congressional documents. Dunlap was interested, but in the ensuing negotiations, he soon discovered that Jefferson intended to bring any newspaper produced by the state's public printer under tighter government controls than had been seen previously. Dunlap did not care to embrace such restrictions while also relinquishing his profitable Philadelphia journal. He countered Jefferson's offer with a proposal that he send James Hayes to Richmond to conduct a new office there as the firm of Dunlap & Hayes, just as he had done in Annapolis. Jefferson and his Council of State accepted the counter-offer after some debate, though maintaining the restrictive conditions on any newspaper that Hayes might issue.

For Hayes, the prospect of moving up as public printer in the largest American state from a middling one was, without question, an incentive, as was his appointment as Richmond's postmaster. Still, Hayes brought his brother John along with him, in all probability as the one person he could trust in the unfamiliar Commonwealth. John remained in Virginia until 1783, before returning to Maryland and a lengthy career as that state's public printer. In retrospect, James seems eerily prescient in his decision to include John in the venture, as the entire venture soon spun out of his control.

Once they sealed the bargain with Jefferson, Dunlap & Hayes began to gather the materials needed for their Richmond office. In October 1780, they shipped these from Philadelphia overland to Head of Elk, a port at the head of the Chesapeake Bay, where they were loaded onto a schooner bound for Richmond. Along the way, a heavy gale forced the ship aground. Before the ship could be extricated, or its cargo removed, a British warship arrived on the scene and seized both ship and cargo. After losing his entire office in such an improbable

manner, Hayes appeared in Richmond seeking both compensation and advice from the state government. He found considerable sympathy. The Assembly quickly voted restitution for the loss, and Hayes used that promise to finance a second purchase in Philadelphia. Unfortunately for Hayes, the promised compensation would not actually be paid – and so his indebtedness relieved – until May of 1788. In the interim, things would only get worse.

By the time Hayes had finally set up an office in Richmond, the British army had launched a series of raids in the James and Appomattox River valleys. On January 5, 1781, a raiding force, led by the turncoat Benedict Arnold, trashed the homes and businesses of several prominent patriots in the new state capital, including the printing office of John Dixon (140) and Thomas Nicolson (315). In April, literally on the eve of Hayes issuing the first number of his newspaper, a second force appeared on the James, bound for Richmond. He managed to avoid the subsequent occupation by following his patron – Jefferson – and the Assembly to Charlottesville with his press in hand. The raids of the spring and summer of 1781 denuded central Virginia of wagons and horses, either seized or destroyed by the British, leaving Hayes stranded in Charlottesville, spending the rest of the year there, essentially in exile.

Meanwhile, the government printing work languished. The remaining printers stayed in the Tidewater area and were, remarkably, little molested. Indeed, the new Richmond firm of Thomas Nicolson & William Prentis (340), formed that fall, benefitted from his absence. They were contracted to cover some of his work, all paid for out of his salary. By the time Hayes finally returned to the capital, he was seriously over extended. Amazingly, his situation now became even bleaker. Though overt hostilities had ended at Yorktown, Atlantic commerce was remained disrupted in advance of the 1783 peace. In this uncertain environment, Hayes could not find paper to print on, despite his noteworthy Philadelphia connections. And so his backlog grew larger, even as he finally published his oft-delayed newspaper, *The Virginia Gazette or The American Advertiser*.

The same problems that had bedeviled previous public printers now beset Hayes. The point in bringing him to Virginia had been undermined by the events of 1781. His "well provided press" had ceased to be that and would rarely, if ever, be so in the future. Keeping that press "well provided" meant paying regularly for the materials and labor needed to operate it, and not just paying for those things whenever the Assembly was in session – something Hayes was now unable to do. The irregularity and variability of his public salary was a nearly insurmountable problem. Still, he tried to deal with his difficulties in an "honorable" way, by calling on both his subscribers and friends to assist in his recovery. Nevertheless, the debts remained, and Hayes needed fluid capital to operate a viable printing office.

In 1784, at age 25, Hayes married "Mrs. Hardyman, relict of the late William Hardyman, Esq." This union was likely more than a simple love match. Indeed, "Mrs. Hardyman" was possibly the most desirable widow in central Virginia at the time. Born Ann Dent Black in 1755, the new Mrs. Hayes was the daughter of William Black, an official in the colonial administrations of William Gooch (1727-50) and Robert Dinwiddie (1751-58). That service brought Black a 3500 acre grant on the banks of the James opposite Richmond, which devolved to his daughter as the "Falls Plantation" in Chesterfield County. Her first husband had been a merchant in Charles City County, who evidently saw the plantation as a viable

base for his business enterprises; however, he did not live out the war. It is not much of a stretch to say that Hayes, in his ever-growing fiscal straits, had similar designs on William Black's estate through the person of Black's then thirty-year-old widowed daughter.

While the marriage may have helped his financial situation, Hayes was still unable to meet the schedule demanded by his public appointment. He soon discovered that the other Richmond printers were lobbying for his removal from office, each arguing that they could perform the job better than he could. This led to increasing legislative scrutiny of his office in 1785 and installing a new set of production guidelines for each Assembly's session-laws. Hayes was, in essence, being micromanaged by officials who were not printers, and who set deadlines that were unattainable given the state of printing technology – the authorities wanted overnight results from what was then a weeks-long process. His inability to fulfill their unrealistic expectations further slowed the pace of his compensation, as the veracity of each invoice that he presented to the legislature was investigated. In the end, Hayes was forced to focus his office's shrinking capabilities on the one revenue-generating venture then left to him, his *Gazette and Advertiser*, at the expense of attending to the public business. The tension between Hayes and the Assembly dragged on until May 1786 when Governor Patrick Henry fired him with the unanimous consent of the Council of State.

Hayes's back-log and the work generated by the Fall 1786 Assembly was divided among the city's other printers, with the backlog paid for out of monies still owed Hayes. The Assembly continued this arrangement until it finally proved unworkable as well, and so appointed John Dixon as sole public printer in 1789. Negotiations over Hayes's settlement, including the long-overdue compensation for the loss of his office apparatus in 1780, dragged on another two years. By that time, however, Hayes appears to have retired from the printing trade, having closed both his office and his newspaper in December 1786.

Done in by a failure grounded in both circumstances and politics, Hayes settled into a life as the master of his wife's Manchester plantation. But even that occupation put Hayes in the public eye, alternately praised and reviled for his actions. In 1794, Richmond was gripped by a small pox epidemic, as many cities were in the early Republic era. Manchester authorities, across the river, closed their end of Mayo's Bridge to prevent its spread to the Southside. Unfortunately for Hayes, he resided in Richmond, but the Falls Plantation was on the other side of the bridge. He repeatedly broke quarantine by rowing across the James, commuting between home and farm. The town militia eventually caught two slaves he had summoned to transport him, beating them severely. Enraged, Hayes confronted the captain of the guard at the south end of the bridge, only to find himself held overnight, and then forced to post bond to prevent a repeat of the confrontation. Hayes continued circumventing the quarantine until one of his friends was detained by the Chesterfield County militia, which had been called out to reinforce the ongoing blockade. Angered once again, Hayes gathered a "mob of Richmonders" intent on crossing Mayo's Bridge and breaking the quarantine permanently. The governor, now Henry Lee, was forced to intervene. He formally called out the militias of both towns and both counties to keep them under his command and then he negotiated a settlement whereby the closed bridge would be reopened to Northsiders, provided that they bypassed Manchester proper and continued onward into the Southside.

Hayes's management of Falls Plantation allowed him to build a new, more opulent home in Richmond around 1800. But he still was not entirely successful in business dealings there. In 1802, he was compelled to sue the Petersburg bookseller John Somervell (394) to recover a debt that had allowed Somervell to acquire part of his wife's patrimony to pay for that new abode. Thus, Hayes's last appearance in the public record is that of an aggrieved, over-extended creditor, not the independent tradesman he had been on his arrival; he clearly had become a self-interested man, not the disinterested Republican he was expected to be two decades earlier when he was invited to Virginia. It was both a tragic and comic result for an English immigrant who died at a relatively young age.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1759 Lancashire, England.
Married: ca. 1784 Ann Dent Black Hardyman @ Richmond, Virginia.
Died: Oct. 6 1804 Richmond, Virginia.
Children: Ann Dent (1787-1861), John (1790-1834), Delia (1794-1838).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Rawson, "Guardians," chap. 5; "Hayes Family," *VMHB* (1941); Ward & Greer, *Richmond during the Revolution, Moore, Albemarle, Lutz, Chesterfield*; notices in Richmond newspapers (1781-1802).