

209 HEISKELL, FREDERICK S. — [MAJ. FREDERICK STEIDINGER HEISKELL]

Printer

Winchester

Printer in Winchester office of William Heiskell (211) and John Heiskell (210), his brothers.

Heiskell was one of the three sons of Frederick Heiskell (1752-1815) and Catherine Von Steidinger (1756-99) who were trained in the printing trade in Winchester before going on to successful tenures as newspaper proprietors. In 1792, his parents had moved their large family (then numbering seven children) from Washington County, Maryland, to a farm in Shenandoah County; his father eventually established a dry-goods business in Winchester and began apprenticing his six sons to various trades in that town.

Young Frederick was evidently the last of the three printing apprentices to come to the trade, being described in 1814 as a printer in the office of eldest brother John. But younger brother William was the actual progenitor of the family press, having acquired it in 1808 from the estate of his late master, Richard Bowen (045). Bowen had founded the business, including its long-lived Federalist paper, *The Centinel and Winchester Gazette*, in April 1788 and had sustained it through five challenges from Jeffersonian alternatives. At his death, William Heiskell was his twenty-year-old shop foreman and heir-apparent. It appears that he used family money (provided by his merchant-planter father) to purchase the business and family labor (embodied in his brothers Frederick and John) to keep it running. In early 1811, William sold his interest in the business to John and moved to Richmond to work briefly in the office of Thomas Ritchie (360); he then moved on to Lee County, just north of Knoxville, Tennessee, retiring from the printing trade at that time to pursue a life as a slave-holding patrician and regional political figure. Frederick followed suit in early 1814, joining another brother, Daniel, in forging a new family base in the eastern Tennessee mountains near Knoxville; they were joined there by William in 1833. The moves left the Winchester press solely in the hands of brother John; he continued the business and his *Winchester Gazette* with only a brief interruption (1823-24) until 1826 when he sold it all to Joseph H. Sherrard, a district court justice there, and retired in ill health.

Meanwhile, Frederick was building his own newspaper establishment in Knoxville. After about two years as a journeyman in the office of George Wilson, founder and owner of the *Knoxville Gazette*, he formed a partnership in April 1816 with Hugh Brown – soon to be his brother-in-law -- to publish a competing *Knoxville Register*. At that time, Knoxville was about to regain the role of the state's capital, after a five-year-long move to Nashville, and Heiskell and Brown had positioned themselves perfectly to obtain the public-printing contract for the state government; despite Brown's retirement in 1829, it was a function that Heiskell did not relinquish until 1837, when he sold the *Register* and its press to Col. W. B. A. Ramsey and Robert Craighead to retire from the printing trade permanently.

His large farm just west of Knoxville, called "Fruit Hill," was Heiskell's home for the next forty-two years, as well as his new political base. In retirement his influence over Tennessee politics did not end; he was simply transformed into a senior statesman. He was a trustee of both the local women's academy (the Tennessee Female Institute) and the East Tennessee University (today the University of Tennessee). In 1836, he was a driving force in founding

the Tennessee Press Association, serving as its first president, so gaining the sobriquet as "the father of Tennessee journalism." But Heiskell never lost his political sway. Beginning in 1847, he was elected to three terms in Tennessee's Senate as an ardent Jacksonian. Heiskell used that position to join his brother William, also now in the state legislature, to advocate for the development of railroads in east Tennessee, gaining a series of legislative measures that supported construction of routes linking Knoxville to other roads north and south of the city. Understanding the importance of those links to the economic health of the region, both Heiskell brothers became Unionists with the 1860 election. But with the shelling of Fort Sumter, they both committed to the Confederate war effort. Frederick was named to command of a local militia unit defending Knoxville, gaining the title of Major with that job; his two sons followed his lead and were able to build political careers of their own after the war as a result of their conspicuous service.

Heiskell himself, unlike his brother William, retired from public life with the war's end. The aging patrician now needed to focus on reestablishing his farm's agricultural base after having lost his enslaved workforce to emancipation. It became his primary occupation for the rest of his life. In 1880, he finally had to leave the farm to the management of others; the ninety-two-year-old Heiskell moved into a house in the town of Rogersville, among the relatives of his second wife. He died there two years later, little noticed in that day's papers despite his years of service to his adopted state as a journalist and a legislator.

Personal Data

Born:	In	1786	Hagerstown, Washington County, Maryland.
Married [1]:	July 17	1816	Mary Eliza Brown @ Jonesboro, Tennessee.
Married [2]:	July 21	1853	Alice Armstrong Fulkerson @ Rogersville, Tenn.
Died:	Nov. 29	1882	Rogersville, Hawkins County, Tennessee.
Children:	Joseph Brown (b. 1823); Carrick White (b. 1836), perhaps more.		

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Eastern Tennessee State University Library, Special Collections authority record; Speer, *Prominent Tennesseans*; Hyskell, *Early Heiskells and Hyskells* (1958).