

214 HENKEL, AMBROSE – [REV. AMBROSIUS HENKEL]

Printer & Publisher

New Market

Publisher of numerous German language imprints issued from his family-owned press in New Market; also publisher of the *Virginische Volksberichter und Neumarket Wochenschrift* there (1807-09) with father Paul Henkel (217) and brother Solomon Henkel (218).

The Henkel family was one of Lutheran evangelicals who conducted a press in New Market that produced imprints supporting their ministry. Their crusade was founded on the idea of an unadulterated Lutheran canon focusing on the Augsburg Confession of 1530. Yet the acculturation of German settlers into English language and ways in early-Republic America was then distancing those immigrants from their ethnocultural roots. So if the Henkels were to advance their style of "confessional Lutheranism," they needed to also preserve German language and culture as well. Thus the output of the Henkel Press was a combination of religious and linguistic imprints – religious ones promoting their theological perspective, linguistic ones encouraging the use of German by their followers and prospective adherents. Both genres sustained an itinerant ministry stretching from southern Michigan to northern Georgia, though focused primarily on the family's home hearth in the Great Valley regions of Virginia and North Carolina.

Ambrose Henkel would follow his father into the Lutheran ministry, though he first started adulthood as a printer. In 1802, the sixteen-year-old Henkel, Paul's third son, was sent to Hagerstown, Maryland, to learn the printing trade from John Gruber, the noted bilingual almanac publisher. He returned to New Market with the parts needed for a printing press in 1806, for which father Paul then built a wooden frame; the finished press was purportedly set up in the front room of the family home and Ambrose began printing religious tracts for distribution through Paul's travels. His eldest brother Solomon is credited with instigating the project, having broached the idea to their father in an 1804 letter; he was then the postmaster there, having returned home from Philadelphia, where he had been trained as a surgeon and apothecary, to start a medical practice; Solomon saw the impending return of his brother as an opportunity to provide needed texts for their father's ministry. Paul agreed and returned to New Market in 1805 to assist in starting the project. For the next seven years, Ambrose was the managing partner in this family firm.

While their press was initiated for religious imprints, father Paul joined sons Ambrose and Solomon in publishing a non-partisan weekly in late 1807: the *Virginische Volksberichter und Neumarket Wochenschrift* (roughly, *Virginia Peoples' Reporter and New Market Weekly Newsletter*). Although the three men were the *Volksberichter's* recorded publishers – with Solomon as its financier, Ambrose as its printer, and Paul as its editor – the paper involved the entire Henkel family, both in content and production. Their weekly spurned political issues to present news informed by confessional Lutheranism and traditional German culture. But in the ever-changing American environment, that approach was problematic, as it sharply limited the journal's readership and patronage. As a result, its publication ceased after just seventy-seven issues (December 1807 to June 1809), and the press reverted to its original missionary intent.

The numerous inexpensive imprints produced by the Henkel Press prove a more enduring legacy than the ephemeral *Volksberichter*. They are probably a more influential one as well, given their wider distribution, aided by Solomon's continuing service as postmaster. In the first fifteen years of the press's operation (1806–1820), the family published at least fifty-eight distinct imprints – almost four per year. Many of these were multiple editions of titles that became standard items in their inventory, so indicating either their popularity or their centrality to their evangelical mission – likely both. The most famous of these were the series of German-language primers that they wrote and published, generically called the "ABC Books" in their correspondence and business accounts. These were generally written and published by Ambrose who proved to be the family's juvenile literature counterpoint to the adult-focused writings of his father. Still, while produced in large quantities, the number of reader and primer titles paled in comparison to the numerous tracts written by Paul Henkel targeting an adult audience. Foremost among these was his *Christliche Catechismus* (or *Christian Catechism*), which drew on and explicated the Augsburg Confession. The Henkel Press issued five editions of the work between 1811 and 1816, with each produced in both English and German versions, despite the father's aversion to translating his faith's fundamental texts. A series of hymnbooks also written by Paul added to the abundance of New-Market-produced catechisms. The balance of the father's authorial work was a series of commentaries and sermons, none of which saw more than one edition published, though all were aimed at adults literate in German who were the principal target of his ministry. His involvement with the Lutheran Synod of North Carolina, especially after its schism between liberal and conservative perspectives in 1819, made their press the authoritative voice of the evangelical faction, now led by Paul's fourth son, David (216). Similarly, the press was also the source for printed reports of the irregular meetings of the confessional Lutheran evangelicals of Virginia attended by the patriarch.

Ambrose's tenure at the press was apparently interrupted by service in the Virginia militia during the War of 1812. Solomon evidently took control of the Henkel Press in his absence; it was a temporary arrangement that became permanent one when Solomon became the registered owner of the press in about 1815, though some sources report that transfer as coming in 1817. In either case, his retirement from regular participation in the printing trade marks the beginning of a lengthy career as an evangelical Lutheran minister; Ambrose completed his studies in 1823 and preached his first sermon that fall. He would continue in the ministry for nearly fifty years. In that time, Henkel was often asked to prepare liturgical works for publication, several of which issued from his family's New Market press. For much of his ministry, he was assigned to the regions of North Carolina once given to his father.

But as he aged, Henkel limited his travels and returned to New Market, taking on an "elder statesman" role like that embraced by his father in his final years. He seems to have stayed close to home during the Civil War, but reemerged as an active minister in the New Market area after the war. There he lived out his days with his third wife, Fannie Hoyle, sister of his brother David's wife Catherine. On his death in 1870, Ambrose was remembered as "a scholar, theologian, translator, editor, and printer, as well as a preacher." Fittingly, he was buried alongside his father in the Emmanuel Lutheran Church cemetery in New Market.

Personal Data

Born: July 11 1786 New Market, Shenandoah County, Virginia.
Married [1]: Sept. 29 1812 Catherine Hoke @ Catawba County, NC (d.1815).
Married [2]: Sept 15 1816 Mary Kite @ Page County, Virginia (d. 1826).
Married [3]: Oct. 3 1827 Veronica "Fannie" Hoyle @ Catawba County, NC.
Died: Jan. 6 1870 Rochelle, Orange County, Virginia.
Children: by Catherine: Noah Isiah
by Mary: Mary Katherine, Areana Mary Elizabeth, Eleanora Caroline,
Paul Philip
by Fannie: Gerhardt Ambrose (b. 1828), David Hieronymus (b. 1830).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Rawson, "Guardians," chaps.6-7 (drawing on Henkel family papers now deposited at University of Virginia, James Madison University, College of William & Mary, and Library of Virginia); *Henkel Memorial* (1910); *Life Sketches of Lutheran Clergy*.