

229 HUNTER, MILES

Printer & Publisher

Williamsburg, Richmond, Petersburg

Publisher of the *Virginia Gazette and Petersburg Intelligencer* (1786-88) with William Prentis (340); previously a journeyman printer in the Williamsburg office of John Dixon Sr. (140) and William Hunter Jr. (231), and in the Richmond office of James Hayes (207).

Hunter was a Williamsburg-trained printer with apparent connections to the family of the late Virginia public printer William Hunter (230). In January 1778, he signed for a payment to the office of Dixon & Hunter from the state government, indicating his employment by that firm, one conducted, in part, by William Hunter Jr., the only son of the late public printer; their common surname suggests that Miles was a descendant of one of the senior Hunter's brothers, with some sources indicating that the two were cousins and that their fathers had been brothers. By mid-1782, he was working in the Richmond office of the new public printer James Hayes. His employment between those dates is unknown, but it would seem that he had assisted Thomas Nicolson (315) in his relocation of the Dixon & Nicolson office – successor to Dixon & Hunter – to Richmond in April 1780, and that he joined Hayes when he finally established his office there about the time that Dixon and Nicolson parted ways in late 1781. Nicolson formed a new partnership in January 1782 with another former Williamsburg hand, William Prentis, which continued profitably until January 1785, when their office was destroyed in a fire; their alliance dissolved in the ensuing reconstruction and Prentis began looking for opportunities beyond Richmond. In February 1786, Prentis expressed an interest in Petersburg and was invited by the town fathers there to set up a printing business.

Hunter also began looking for such opportunities about that same time; Hayes was under pressure from the state government for his perceived malfeasance in office and his removal seemed imminent from early 1785 onward, especially when he was unable to assist in producing of a set of Virginia's collected laws to replace one lost in the Nicolson & Prentis fire. In April 1785, Hunter purchased a 2000-acre tract in Jefferson County in the District of Kentucky and contemplated relocating there; in late 1785, a convention of enfranchised citizens meeting at Danville to consider Kentucky statehood offered Hunter the chance to become their official printer, producing a weekly that would support their statehood bid; subsequent accounts of the offer report Hunter was concerned about Indian predations and unhealthy conditions there, but the reality was that the negotiations broke down over Hunter's desire for financial guarantees in making the expensive move west, which the convention members were unwilling to give him; as a result, Hunter stayed in Richmond. But then Hayes was finally removed from his public office in May 1786, closing his semi-official weekly paper and reducing the number of his workers. Displaced, Hunter quickly joined with Prentis in Petersburg, so extricating both men from Richmond's problems while establishing the solitary press there.

In July 1786, the new firm of Hunter & Prentis issued the *Virginia Gazette and Petersburg Intelligencer*, that town's first newspaper. It was a classic mercantile advertiser designed to support the port's commerce. Lacking competition for its first five years, the *Intelligencer*

built a foundation that sustained the paper until the Civil War siege of Petersburg, long after the deaths of its founders. While Prentis would go on to a long career as a civic and business leader in the town, Hunter's association with Petersburg was brief and bittersweet. Shortly before he left Richmond, Hunter married one Sally Gardiner of Hanover County; however, she died just three weeks after the *Intelligencer* began publication. Hunter remarried in December 1787, taking Martha "Patsy" Pritchard of Dinwiddie County as his second wife; but she too died the following November. Remarkably, Hunter himself died just two weeks later, suggesting that husband and wife were both carried off by the same disease, likely a fever that often infected the river port. They left no children to carry on his trade.

Personal Data

Born:	ca.	1757	Williamsburg or York County, Virginia.
Married [1]:	May 14	1786	Sally Gardiner @ Hanover County, Va. (d. 7/86)
Married [2]:	Dec. 22	1787	Martha Pritchard @ Petersburg, Va. (d. 11/88)
Died:	Dec. 12	1788	Petersburg, Virginia.

Died without issue from either spouse.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Hubbard on Richmond; *Selected Virginia Revolutionary War Records*; Richmond City Census 1782; Seagrave, *Artisans & Mechanics*; *Kentucky Encyclopedia*; *Bradford's Notes on Kentucky*; *Records of Hanover County*; newspaper notices in Alexandria (1786-88) and Norfolk (1786-88).