

**236 JENNINGS, SAMUEL K. — [REV. SAMUEL KENNEDY JENNINGS. M.D.]**

**Editor**

**Lynchburg**

Editor of the *Lynchburg Press* (1809-15), so employed variously by Fleming Grantland (185), Jacob Haas (196), and John F. Lamb (259).

Jennings occupation as a newspaper editor in Lynchburg was but a transitory episode in a life otherwise filled with religious ministry and medical practice. He was shaped by two key familial influences: his maternal grandfather and namesake was a Presbyterian elder who brought Jennings's father to a ministerial life; meanwhile, his father, Jacob Jennings (1744-1813) was a physician who both practiced medicine and preached the faith following service in the Revolutionary War; Jennings would do likewise.

On graduating from Rutgers in 1790, Jennings moved to Virginia to rejoin his family, which had relocated from New Jersey to the New London area as a part of his father's ministry. There he trained as a physician under his father and began a medical practice. However, Jennings was drawn away from his Presbyterian roots by the Methodist fervor in the region that would bring Lorenzo Dow (148) there in 1804 and 1812. He embraced Methodism in 1794 and began preaching in the neighborhood in 1796, though he was never formally ordained as a minister; that lay status that would later cause him considerable grief. Still, he was made a deacon by Bishop Asbury in 1805, and so was instrumental in constructing the first Methodist church building in Lynchburg then.

At that time, Jennings also began writing essays for publication in various periodicals, both secular and sectarian. Of particular concern was, evidently, the perspective of Lynchburg's solitary newspaper, the *Lynchburg Star*, and its editor and proprietor, another local doctor named James Graham (183), who opposed the evangelical fervor of the Methodist revivals then sweeping southwestern Virginia. In 1805, Jennings even had a pamphlet published in Richmond defending the practice of camp meetings that were the central feature of those revivals. So when journeyman printer Fleming Grantland came to Lynchburg in spring 1809 to publish the *Lynchburg Press*, a weekly competing with Graham, he found in Jennings an able and willing editor with a considerable local following. For five of the next six years, Jennings was the newspaper's editorial voice, leaving that role only during the year-long proprietorship of William Waller Gray (193), which followed Grantland's departure in May 1810 to join his brother Seaton (186) in his Georgia press office; but once Gray sold the *Press* to Jacob Haas and John F. Lamb in early 1811, Jennings returned to the seat that he had filled previously; his efforts brought about the death of Graham's *Star* in early 1812, less than a year after his return, even as he continued his medical practice.

Contemporaries would later report that Jennings employed a "lucid, pointed, logical style" in his writing, so having a great effect on readers. Yet he was also able to use his position to produce imprints for others advancing the Methodist cause. Of particular note was the publication of two new works by Lorenzo Dow in 1812: the oft-reprinted tract *Dialogue between Two Characters; Curious and Singular!!* and *A Journey from Babylon to Jerusalem or The Road to Peace and True Happiness*, a 250-page opus attacking Deistic attitudes which

was the largest imprint that the Lynchburg printing office of Haas & Lamb ever produced.

But as time passed, Jennings' attention gradually wandered to new undertakings. From 1806 onward, he developed a preoccupation with the treatment of the fevers that then regularly plagued the country. By 1814 he had determined that the best treatments involved the use of heated baths, publishing a treatise of the subject through the Richmond press of Thomas Ritchie (360). Within a year, Jennings had patented a therapeutic apparatus which could be taken from place to place by physicians (U.S. patent #2049x) and was promoting the device from lodgings in Richmond. That activity led to extensive trials of the device among the troops stationed in and around Norfolk in 1814-15. By fall of 1816, he was living in the port, with his "portable warm and hot bath" being built there for sale throughout the country.

Still, Jennings also continued to preach at the invitation of Methodist congregations on the Southside. In 1817, Bishop Asbury asked him to preach before the annual meeting of the Baltimore Conference as an introduction of the man he wanted to head up a new Methodist college there. The conference approved and Jennings opened the Asbury College there in 1818. He conducted the school and its classics-based curriculum until about 1824 when his medical skills brought an appointment as president of the Medical Society of Baltimore.

Over the next three years, Jennings organized an effort to open a medical school in the city; in 1827, alongside six other physicians, he opened one in union with Washington College of Pennsylvania as its Medical Department, receiving a charter from the Maryland legislature in 1833 and operating thereafter as the Washington Medical College of Baltimore; Jennings served as its professor of therapeutics and *material medica* until 1839, and then served as professor of obstetrics until 1842. He was also named the professor of anatomy for the Maryland Academy of Fine Arts in 1838, serving there until 1845, when he retired from his medical practice.

Despite this success in the medical community, this period was one of considerable spiritual turmoil for Jennings. As evangelicism grew America in the 1820s, the Baltimore Conference moved to reassert their authority over Methodist doctrines and theology by reining in its numerous lay preachers. Jennings was among a group of long-time adherents who objected to the interference of a national body in local affairs, seeing the action as antithetical to what he had learned directly from Asbury; moreover, it was against the democratic temper of the times. In protest, he joined with several other lay preachers – as the Union Society of Baltimore – to press for reforms to the new-found authoritarian practices of the Baltimore Conference; the group publicized their activities and ideas in a periodical entitled *Mutual Rights*, a name reflecting their sense that church fathers were ignoring the God-given rights of their followers. The controversy came to a head in 1827 when the Baltimore Conference charged Jennings and eleven others with violating church doctrine: they had formed an unordained clerical body in opposition to the legitimate ordained one; all were promptly convicted and expelled from the Methodist Episcopal Church. However, the dissidents did not recognize the conference's right to expel anyone, and then promptly withdrew from the church with considerable publicity, not a small amount of which was written and published by Jennings himself; in 1830, a convention of dissident Methodists met in Pittsburgh to form a new Methodist Protestant Church that did not recognize the right of any ordained cleric to

dictate policies or practices to church members or lay preachers.

This unhappy turn of events may explain why Jennings put so much of his energy into the Washington Medical College after 1827. It may also explain why he left Baltimore when he retired in 1845. Late nineteenth-century biographies of Jennings all report that the aging patriarch relocated to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to be nearer to the children and grandchildren of his who had settled there; but he also preached extensively there and helped form new congregations, suggesting that Alabama then provided a more welcoming environment for his ministry than did his long-time home of Baltimore. Moreover, he remained there until he suffered a stroke in 1852 at age eighty-one. Jennings was brought back to Baltimore and its superior medical care by a step-son and his wife. A subsequent stroke in 1854 finally took his life while he was living there. Remarkably, his passing was not mentioned in either the Methodist Episcopal or Presbyterian journals of the day, while the Methodist Protestant ones published lengthy memorials of this multifaceted evangelical.

### ***Personal Data***

Born: June 6 1771 Essex County, New Jersey.  
Married [1]: Jan. 18 1793 Mary Cox @ New London, Virginia (d. 1820).  
Married [2]: Feb. 4 1821 Hannah Hood @ Baltimore, Maryland (d. 1838).  
Married [3]: Mar 22 1840 Lucy Fore @ Baltimore, Maryland (d. 1850).  
Died: Oct. 19 1854 Baltimore, Maryland.  
Children: All by Mary: John Cox (b. 1794); Samuel Kennedy Jr. (b. 1796); Ann Williamson (b. 1800); Mary (b. 1802); Jacob Mead (b. 1804); Catherine Sidney (b. 1806).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Cabell, *Sketches of Lynchburg*; Christian, *Lynchburg*; *Campbell Chronicles*; Sprague, *Annals* (Methodist); *Discourse on Jennings* (1855); *History of Methodist Protestant Church* (1860); Drinkhouse, *Methodist Reform*; Steiner, *University Education in Maryland*; genealogical data from Jennings & Kennedy family charts posted on Ancestry.com (October 2012).