

241 JONES, JOHN R.

Bookseller & Bookbinder

Richmond

Bookseller and bookbinder in Richmond from 1809 until sometime after mid-1812.

Jones was a bookseller in Richmond who became a real-estate and probate attorney there after the War of 1812. His familial origins are hidden by an exceedingly common name, but advertising notices from neighboring businesses indicate that he was best known to them as a bookbinder, and so probably had trained as such in the city's bindery shops before 1809.

From July 1809 until mid-1812, Jones advertised a book and stationery store on Main Street near the well-known Eagle Tavern that specialized in both literary and legal titles. Thus it is not surprising that he eventually turned to the law after having a workable library at hand from which to study. But Jones had other interests as well, serving as the distribution point for several northern literary magazine, most notably the respected *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* of William Emerson and Samuel Cooper Thacher. Jones also evidently had an affinity for Presbyterian evangelicism. In 1811 and 1812, his store was the collection point in Richmond for books donated to the mission of Rev. Thaddeus Osgood, a Massachusetts minister who was commissioned to spread the faith along the Niagara frontier among white settlers and native peoples; it was a mission based on inculcating literacy and distributing devotional imprints that was disrupted shortly after these collections by the War of 1812.

An end to Jones's advertising in 1812 might suggest that the war drew him away from his business. But the real cause of the demise of his bookstore was apparently the bankruptcy of the major Philadelphia publishing house of Cornelius (102) & Andrew (101) Conrad in 1813; indeed, Jones may have been one of the causes of that dramatic failure. In October 1812, he filed suit in Richmond's chancery court against the Conrads and the various partnerships the brothers had formed with Virginia-based booksellers to recover monies that he had advanced to them for book stocks he never received. As the failure of the Conrads' business was triggered by an unwillingness of other Philadelphia publishers to accept and convey their promissory notes (the currency they all used with their printers and suppliers there), so it seems that Jones's suit was a precursor to their ensuing collapse. He had given the Conrads bank notes in exchange for materials they now could not provide as a result of their growing unreliability. In doing so, Jones involved some of Virginia's largest booksellers in litigation as well – Samuel Pleasants (331) of Richmond, John Somervell (394) of Petersburg, Leroy Anderson (011) of Williamsburg, Caleb Bonsal (040) of Norfolk, and Robert Gray (190) of Alexandria – so undermining the evident exchange relationships that he had previously with those tradesmen. Thus his decision to sue probably also marks a conscious decision for Jones to leave the book-trade at that time.

During the War of 1812, there is not a trace of Jones or a mention of his store in Richmond's newspapers; he finally reappears in 1816 as a practicing attorney without mention of his store. Moreover, this new profession was short-lived, as apparently was its practitioner. Jones died in mid-September 1819, drawing only a brief mention in the *Richmond Enquirer* of Thomas Ritchie (360), which noted that Jones was "beloved by his friends and esteemed by his acquaintances." The marked brevity of that notice, and the absence of any mention

of a surviving family, suggest that he was still relatively young and unsettled when he died.

Personal Data

Died: September 1819 Richmond, Virginia

No other personal data yet discovered.

Sources: Advertising notices in *Richmond Enquirer* (1809-12), *Virginia Patriot* (1810-11); *Richmond Commercial Compiler* (1816-19); death notice in *Enquirer*, Sept. 21, 1819; Reimer, *Printers and Men of Capital*.