

245 JORDAN, M.T.C. – [MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO JORDAN]

Bookbinder & Bookseller

Norfolk

Bookseller, bookbinder, and job-printer in Norfolk (1802-19).

Jordan came to Virginia's printing trade through his older brother, Augustus C. Jordan (244), after having conducted a small grocery business in Norfolk. He was one of three brothers who were named for figures in classical history – Alexander, Augustus Caesar, and Marcus Tullius Cicero – and who held positions of considerable responsibility in the community in their lifetimes. Circumstances suggest that they were natives of the Norfolk area and sons of a respected family; however, as there were many Jordans then living there, all descended from a single seventeenth-century progenitor, determining their exact parentage is difficult without further documentation.

This Jordan was apparently trained as a bookbinder in the shop of his brother Augustus, as that trade is the specific one associated with him in his published obituaries. His appearance as a part of his brother's business seems tied to the closing of his twice-weekly *Epitome of the Times* in 1802; that press office was reorganized then to focus on its previously ancillary functions: job-printing, stationery, and book-selling. In the process, Augustus succeeded in developing a respected and substantial bookstore with the reputation of being the best source for French-language titles in Virginia. As a result, he became an ever more prominent figure in Norfolk's civic and political life, taking on roles as a county magistrate, a captain in the local militia regiment, a director of the Norfolk branch of the Bank of Virginia, treasurer of the Masonic lodge, secretary-trustee of the Norfolk Academy, and secretary-treasurer of the Mutual Assistance Society that aided fire victims there. So as Augustus's non-business commitments grew, Marcus assumed evermore responsibility for conducting their store. As a result, he assumed ownership of the store on Augustus's death in March 1810, as brother Alexander administered the estate.

Jordan's inherited bookstore was transformed by the War of 1812, which disrupted its long-standing connections to English and French suppliers. Thus the store was altered from one offering uncommon European imprints to one closely tied to American publishing houses, particularly those in New York City, as evinced by shipping notices published in Norfolk's mercantile advertisers. At the same time, Jordan's militia service during the war, serving as a captain in the 1st Battalion of 54th Virginia Militia Regiment, pulled him away from daily oversight of the business. So by war's end, the business was no longer known as a printing house; indeed, this Jordan never issued an imprint under his own colophon, even ceasing production of the previously successful *Jordan's Virginia & North Carolina Almanac*, first issued in 1802. Part of the problem may have been his lack of training as a printer; another seems to have been his assumption of civic and political roles in the port city, as had both of his brothers. Marcus was named as a director of the Bank of Virginia in Norfolk, a post once held previously by both of his brothers, even as Alexander now served as the bank's cashier. In 1815, Jordan was elected Commissioner of the Revenue for Norfolk, the city's primary tax collector. And at about that same time, he became a founding officer (vice-president) of the city's Benevolent Mechanic Society that aided destitute artisans there.

These diverting activities, however, apparently impinged the profitability of his store. In May 1818, Jordan recast the business as a "New Book Store," one focusing on instructional materials, especially school books and literary titles published in New York. Nevertheless, by the following March, he had closed the twenty-year-old book store completely. That ending was undoubtedly influenced by the post-war growth of competition from stores with more direct connections to New York and Philadelphia publishers, such as those of Christopher Hall (198) and Caleb Bonsal (040) respectively. It also seems that Jordan's health was likely a consideration. He died in July 1819, four months after the closing of the bookstore, after an illness that had confined him to his residence for "about eight weeks." Jordan left behind "an amiable wife, four small children, and a large circle of relatives" to mourn his passing. William C. Shields (381), evidently a close friend and editor of Norfolk's *American Beacon*, wrote that "if there ever existed a man of more benevolence ... we have never heard of him," so reporting a general sense in the town that his contributions to their community were more philanthropic than mercantile in nature, and that they should not be forgotten.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1780 Apparently in Virginia.
Married: Nov. 28 1811 Abby Pusey @ Norfolk, Virginia.
Died: July 19 1819 Norfolk, Virginia.
Children: Four unnamed children survived him; a son, Marcus Jr., died in 1824.

Sources: *Simmon's Norfolk Directory* (1801 & 1806); Tucker, *Abstracts*; advertising notices in *Norfolk American Beacon* (1810-20); obituary in *American Beacon*, July 20, 1819.