

263 LAWTON, WILLIAM B.

Printer

Norfolk

Journeyman printer working in Norfolk in 1803.

Lawton was a well-known figure in early-Republic Norfolk, though had but a short affiliation with the Virginia print trade. The only sign of that association is found in the announcement of his marriage in 1803; yet while recording his employment as a printer working in Norfolk, the notice was published in the *Petersburg Intelligencer*, suggesting an earlier association with that office, then still conducted by its founder, William Prentis (340), who may have been the master printer who trained Lawton. Determining who he actually worked for in Norfolk, however, is impossible with further evidence.

About 1815, Lawton was appointed as the borough's jailer, leaving a run of official notices that he placed in Norfolk's newspapers. Yet there are a few detailed accounts of his service in that role. The most significant of those accounts was a report on a suit brought against him by the Commonwealth's attorney in 1820; Lawton had released from his custody three British seamen accused of piracy; the district court found against him, saying that he should have kept them in custody under Virginia law, rather than releasing his charges under the provisions of an Anglo-American treaty; but that finding had little effect on his tenure in office, which continued for another six years. The following year, Lawton had a minor role in the sensational murder trial of two Spanish transients who had killed and dismembered a Frenchman travelling with them as their interpreter. But the most widely republished item on the jailer came with his death. In March 1826, Lawton was thrown from his horse on a Norfolk street, striking his head on the curbstone of a newly-paved street, and dying within hours of the resulting skull fracture – a story republished as far north as New York City.

Personal Data

Born:	ca.	1781	Virginia?
Married:	May 12	1803	Sally D. Craig @ Norfolk, Virginia.
Died:	Mar. 28	1826	Norfolk, Virginia.
Children:	Daughter Elizabeth died May 1828, age fifteen.		

Sources: Notices in Norfolk newspapers, 1803-32; *Simmons' Norfolk Directory*, 1806.