

269 LONGDEN, THOMAS

Bookseller, Publisher

Alexandria

Bookseller employed by John A. Stewart (402) in Alexandria (1806), unsuccessful newspaper publisher there (1808), probably employed by Samuel Snowden (393), his brother-in-law.

Longden was an Alexandria native who lived his entire life in the considerable shadow of his father, John Longden, and grandfather, Thomas Longden. The first Thomas was a sergeant in an Alexandria militia unit assigned to Braddock's Expedition of 1755 and was killed in the Battle of the Monongahela in July 1755 that took Braddock's life. Father John was a veteran of the Revolutionary War, who served in the First Light Dragons of "Light Horse Harry" Lee's Legion, and then as a second lieutenant in the Alexandria Artillery Grays later in life; after the Revolution, he became a major civic and business figure in Alexandria, serving as clerk of the Market, as Superintendent of Police, and as a councilor from Ward 2 on the Common Council, while also acting as president of the Mechanical Relief Society, as commissioner (and later director) of the Mechanics Bank, and as director of the Domestic Manufactures Company. The young Longden, however, never approached such social prominence.

Longden first emerged as part of the Virginia print trade in 1806, but in a subordinate role. In the city's census that year, he was recorded as living with, and so working for, Alexandria bookseller John A. Stewart, partner to Peter Cottom (107) in the major bookselling firm of Cottom & Stewart. But unlike others who were associated with that firm, Longden did not ever conduct an independent bookstore, either in Alexandria or elsewhere. Rather, it seems that he then built a trade association with Samuel Snowden, printer and publisher of the *Alexandria Gazette*, who married his sister Nancy in 1800. In June 1808, Longden published a prospectus for a new thrice-weekly paper, *The Columbian*, which was to be printed in Snowden's office. While noting his own Republican principles, Longden said that his paper would not be political in nature, unlike Snowden's avowedly Federalist journal, but one "whose contents and principles shall be satisfactory to the moderate of both parties." Instead, he intended to offer articles solely on "Agricultural, Commerce and Manufactures, together with plans for the general Improvement in Canals, public Roads and various discoveries in any branch of learning or the mechanical arts," all with an eye toward diversifying Alexandria's economic situation. However, Longden evidently never obtained the 400 subscriptions needed to start publication, and so *The Columbian* never issued.

These two incidents provide the only evidence of Longden's role in the Virginia print trade. No subsequent imprints carrying his colophon have been recorded, nor has an account of further trade work been found. Journalistic evidence indicates that after he abandoned the *Columbian* project, Longden entered into a failed business venture with John Hodgkins, an Alexandria grocer and tavern-keeper; after Hodgkins' death in September 1811, his estate sued Longden for full payment of a promissory note; unable to repay the debt, Longden was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1812 with a liquidation of his meager assets coming on October 31st of that year. After that, Longden is not again seen in the papers of Alexandria or neighboring Georgetown and Washington until his death in December 1819, suggesting that he fell into obscure servile employments for the rest of his life.

In January 1820, Samuel Snowden was named administrator of Longden's intestate estate, charged with planning long-term support for his niece, Julia Ann, Longden's only child. Her situation was greatly enhanced in 1830 when John Longden, her grandfather, finally died; his will left adjacent houses on South Royal Street to his only two grandchildren: Julia Ann and Edgar Snowden, Samuel's son and successor. The two buildings remained in the family until the 1880s, and so survived well into the twentieth century; however, the two historic structures were razed in 1968 as part of an urban redevelopment project.

Personal Data

Born: in 1782 Alexandria, Virginia
Married: Dec. 4 1815 Julia Corbin @ Washington, District of Columbia
Died: Dec. 13 1819 Alexandria, Virginia
Children: one daughter, Julia Ann.

Sources: *Artisans & Merchants*; HABS Report VA-685 (1975); Virginia Revolutionary War Rosters; *Historical Court Records of Washington, District of Columbia*; notices in *Alexandria Gazette* (1808-20); genealogical charts for Longden family posted on Genealogy.com (December 2012).