

## 270 LORRAIN, THOMAS W.

**Printer & Publisher**

**Petersburg**

Publisher of *The American Star* (1817) at Petersburg with Marvel W. Dunnivant (154).

Lorrain was a part of the Virginia print trade for only months, but his family's Petersburg-forged Republican fidelity made him – and his brothers – key figures in both Madison's and Monroe's efforts to build an American polis in French Louisiana after the War of 1812.

Coming from Huguenot roots, the Lorrain family arrived in Petersburg from Maryland in the early 1790s with patriarch Thomas Sr. conducting a retail store there until his death in 1811. A business failure late in his life – well before 1810, probably in 1807-08 – compelled him to send his four minor sons away from home to learn differing professions: eldest son Edwin (d. 1819) studied law with William Wirt (1772-1834) in Richmond; second son Alfred (1790-1860) went off to sea, intending to become a ship captain; youngest son John (d. 1819) was apprenticed to an optician and lens maker; and third son Thomas Jr. was sent to learn the print trade in the *Raleigh Register* office of Joseph Gales Sr. (1761-1841), father of the like-named publisher of Washington's *National Intelligencer*, who then conducted the leading Republican paper in the country.

Thomas Jr. had completed his apprenticeship by late 1815 when he relocated to Columbia, South Carolina – that state's capital – to begin publishing a new Republican journal there in opposition to the established Federalist organ of Daniel and Jacob Faust, *The South-Carolina State Gazette*; Lorrain published the first issue of his thrice-weekly *Telescope* on December 19, 1815, and continued with the paper until the spring of 1817. At that time, he sold his successful journal to the company of Cline & Hines (i.e. William Cline, who continued the *Telescope* into the 1830s) in order to return to Petersburg; there, Marvel W. Dunnivant had just proposed publishing *The American Star*, a more strident alternative to the established *Petersburg Republican*, as an adjunct to his lucrative job-printing concern. Lorrain evidently jumped at Dunnivant's offer, but he soon left his new partner hanging; he stayed just four months (June to October 1817) before leaving Petersburg once again, this time for fresh opportunities in New Orleans, never again to return to his Virginia birthplace. Dunnivant struggled on alone until December when he took on John H. Perkins (323) as a new partner; but Dunnivant closed the *Star* in April 1818 after Perkins followed Lorrain's lead and left Petersburg for greener pastures elsewhere.

Lorrain's departure was prompted by his lawyer-brother Edwin; in 1814, Edwin had been appointed the naval officer for the port of New Orleans, after having moved there in 1810 to establish a legal practice; in 1816, he had convinced their seaman-brother Alfred, by then a veteran of William Henry Harrison expeditions in the War of 1812, to join him in Louisiana as his deputy; then in 1817, Edwin persuaded Thomas to come to New Orleans to start another new journal in that port city, this one both Democratic-Republican in its political persuasion and Anglo-American in its cultural perspective. The end of the war with Britain meant that the socio-ethnic conflicts formerly stifled by wartime necessity had reemerged, with the state's several French language papers promoting a creole-oriented agenda over the nationalistic one favored by the Madison administration; in 1816, those papers had

supported the gubernatorial candidacy of Jacques Phillippe Villeré (1761-1830), a creole planter and militia leader who narrowly defeated Joshua Lewis, a Virginia-born, Republican-bred justice of the 1st Judicial District Court.

Lorrain's new daily – *The New-Orleans Chronicle* – was intended as a counterpoint to the creole press; it was advertised as early as February 1818, although it was not actually issued until July, probably to give Lorrain more time to hire capable hands to assist in the labor-intensive project, such as his youngest brother John. From its start, Lorrain's *Chronicle* was an outspoken critic of creole politicians, keeping, as brother Alfred later wrote:

"a strict oversight of the city fathers and sanitary officers mostly French who cared very little about the cleanliness of the place, because they knew that what would poison Americans would fatten themselves. They, however, subscribed liberally to the paper, to learn what was said about them; and our labor was not in vain."

Yet events in late 1819 brought the journalistic venture to an end. In October, both Thomas and John were challenged to duels by the editors of the rival, bilingual *Louisiana Gazette*, William Bruner and Charles Duhy; Thomas was able to resolve his challenge from Duhy without bloodshed, but John died on the "field of honor" as a result of a "second shot" from Bruner (who, ironically, died in a duel the following March, killed by the man who had been his second that day). Then in November, while his deputy-brother Alfred was in Kentucky on family business, Edwin succumbed to one of the port-city's seasonal fevers, leaving the naval office unoccupied. Thomas stepped into the void, but was compelled to abandon his *New-Orleans Chronicle* in the process.

Lorrain returned to the journalistic fray the following spring, following Bruner's death and a suspension of his *Gazette*, publishing the new *Louisiana Advertiser* in conjunction with the New-York-born lawyer John Philpot Curran Sampson, named for the Irish nationalist friend of his emigrant father. But as with Lorrain's prior association with Dunnavant, the concern of Sampson & Lorrain lasted just four months (April to August 1820); he was forced to relinquish his interest in the paper when he was named by James Monroe as the Collector of Revenue in the U.S. Land Office at New Orleans. Amazingly, two days after the partners dissolved their short-lived firm, Sampson fell victim to an ongoing yellow-fever epidemic, dying on August 25th; the *Louisiana Advertiser* went into a six-week-long suspension while Sampson's backers tried to sort out the journal's severely-tangled finances; its new owners were still struggling with that task in December, when they published a request that their paying subscribers identify themselves by making a new payment for the first half of 1821.

His new post gave Lorrain access to a sizeable amount of data on the trade and commerce of the Gulf coast region. By late 1821, that data provided him sufficient material for a new business-oriented weekly, the *New Orleans Commercial Report*. No surviving copies of that journal are known, but its existence was well-recorded in extracts that were republished in other publications, particularly in a long essay on New Orleans's economic development in *DeBow's Review* in 1850 and in nineteenth-century histories of the city. Still, that apolitical venture lasted only a year; in late 1822, Lorrain resigned his land-office post and relocated to Mexico City in early 1823 – in the midst of the debates there over the declaration of the First Mexican Republic – where he printed the weekly *El Archiviste* for a French expatriate

named Prissette. His Mexican sojourn seems to have been prompted by both that country's embrace of Republicanism, as well as his continuing interest in building up Louisiana's trade with Mexico, as evinced by his published correspondence in New York newspapers.

Eventually Lorrain returned to New Orleans, likely in the fall of 1823, when Prissette came under fire from authorities in Mexico City for the perceived radicalism of his paper. But he did not return to journalism there as before. Lorrain's health may have been impaired by his travels, as he does not appear in any public setting after his return to Louisiana. Lorrain died in New Orleans on December 2, 1825, probably just thirty. His passing was widely reported, drawing mention even in Boston and New York newspapers.

His brother Alfred was the only Lorrain sibling to live out a full life. After 1819, he became a Methodist minister, inspired by the preaching of Lorenzo Dow (148), who encouraged him after he had found an evangelical calling while stranded in Kentucky when brothers Edwin and John died; subsequently, he moved his widowed mother and sole surviving sister from Petersburg – and slavery's "corrupting" influence – to Xenia, Ohio; he made that town his base for a circuit-riding ministry that continued until his death in 1860. An autobiography published after Alfred's death provided most of the personal information related here.

### ***Personal Data***

Born:           ca. 1795   Petersburg, Virginia.  
Married:       Dec. 25 1819   Sarah Nixon @ New Orleans, Louisiana.  
Died:          Dec. 2 1825   New Orleans, Louisiana.  
No surviving offspring yet discovered.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Wyatt, *Petersburg Checklist*; Lorrain, *Helm, Sword, and Cross* (1862); *Papers of Archibald D. Murphey* (1914); newspaper notices in New York (1818-25), Washington (1818-25), Boston (1820-25) and Philadelphia (1820); Irish Emigration Database (on Sampson).