

273 LYNCH, JOHN – [ALSO KNOWN AS JOHN O. LYNCH AND JOHN O'LYNCH]

Printer & Publisher

Richmond

Job printer in Richmond (1808-12) and publisher of *The Visitor* (1809-10) there, initially with Charles Southgate (395), then with George Davis (122).

Lynch was an émigré from Ireland who trained in the office of Thomas Nicolson (315). When his master died in November 1808, he acquired Nicolson's press in conjunction with Charles Southgate; the name of their firm – Lynch & Southgate – has led to considerable confusion over both his identity and surname. At about that time, Lynch began using the middle initial "O." to distinguish himself from a like-named Richmond resident, John Lynch, a successful merchant who owned "Lynch's Coffee House," a widely-known meeting place then affiliated with the city's Globe Tavern. Such usage, as well as his Irish origins, led to representations of his name as O'Lynch. Hence the two forms are seen frequently in newspaper advertising between 1808 and 1812; that the two refer to this one individual can be seen in the notices published by Southgate while settling Lynch's estate in 1812 that use both interchangeably.

The date of Lynch's arrival in Virginia is unknown, but his obituary published in the *Virginia Patriot* of Augustine Davis (119) – father of his second partner George Davis – suggests that he and his mother landed in America during the United Irishman troubles of the late 1790s, so before Lynch was ten years of age; he was left orphaned shortly after coming to Virginia, with Nicolson apparently taking the young ward into his care and training. Over the last two years of Nicolson's life, Lynch was his principal assistant, so also his surrogate as the health of the former Williamsburg printer declined. In buying Nicolson's press, Lynch evidently had larger plans in mind than to simply pursue job-printing. Southgate was neither a printer or a journalist, but rather a musician and music teacher, making the pairing unusual. But the paper they issued about six weeks later was as distinctive as they were. *The Visitor* was a biweekly literary journal, produced by

"Lynch, a practical printer, an Irishman of diminutive size, and Southgate, a musician, an Irishman of very large size, who filled many of the pages in musical type."

From the start, Lynch & Southgate gave space in their periodical's pages to the writings of Louis Hue Girardin (180), then principal of Richmond's Hallerian Academy and previously Professor of Modern Languages, History, and Geography at the College of William & Mary; of particular note was Girardin's epic Latin-language poem, *De Monomachia, sive Duello* (*Lines on dueling, addressed to the legislative*), a work still included today in early-American literature collections. But the project seems to have exhausted Southgate; fourteen months later, he sold his interest to George Davis; just a month after that, Lynch & Davis abandoned the idea of printing music in their journal, and advertised the sale their "complete fount of imported MUSIC TYPE, very little worn" on reasonable terms. However, their association was far shorter lived than had been Lynch's first one, lasting only two months; he struggled on alone for two more months before closing *The Visitor* in August 1810. One chronicler saw this demise as inevitable, as "the circulation of such a paper was very limited, and, after a few efforts and throbs, it ceased with its second volume, no successor appearing to claim

the barren realm for many years."

The closing of his literary paper does not seem to have slowed Lunch down any; thereafter he frequently published small tracts, particularly sermons by Richmond ministers. His office was a bookstore as well, and from December 1810, he was the solitary agent in Virginia for *The Shamrock or Hibernian Chronicle*, a weekly produced in New York by Edward Gillespy for non-radical, middle-class Irish immigrants like himself. Lynch also was custodian of the extensive book collection that Nicolson had once operated as a commercial circulating library; on Nicolson's death that collection became the core holdings of the new Richmond Library Company, with Lynch assuming the librarian duties that his master had performed previously. Yet his most widely-distributed publication, and so his most broadly-read one, was his authoritative account of the Richmond Theater Fire of December 1811: *Narrative & Report of the Causes and Circumstances of the Deplorable Conflagration at Richmond*.

When Lynch's profitable report on the theater fire was issued, the printer was just twenty-four years-old, with a wealth of connections in Virginia – a result of his membership in the Richmond Light Infantry Blues, the city's Federalist militia unit – and a bright future. But on April 10, 1812, he was struck with a "slow but irresistible paralysis which attacked his lower extremities" – evidently a stroke. He left Richmond for Yorktown "for the recovery of his health," but never returned, dying there on August 23rd. Thomas Ritchie (360) wrote a verse for his *Enquirer*, saying that,

A sprightlier fancy, or a better heart,
Did bounteous nature ne'er to man impart,
The Boast of humour and good nature's pride;
He lived beloved, much lamented died.

Lynch was survived by his young wife of just eight months, whose unexpected grief was evidently palpable to those who knew her. Charles Southgate undertook the administration of his estate, selling his office at auction in October 1812.

Personal Data

Born:	ca. 1788	Londonderry, Ireland
Married:	Dec. 5 1811	Margaret Quarrier @ Richmond, Virginia
Died:	Aug. 23 1812	Yorktown, York County, Virginia
No known children.		

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Hubbard on Richmond; Christian, *Richmond*; Mordecai, *By-Gone Days*; notices in *Virginia Argus* (1808-12) and *Virginia Patriot* (1808-12); obituary in *Richmond Enquirer*, Aug. 28, 1812.