

275 MADDUX, JOHN

Publisher

Richmond

Compiler and publisher of Richmond's first city directory in 1819.

Maddox was a well-known business agent and "collector of accounts" in Richmond, born into a prominent Quaker family in the Cedar Creek Meeting of nearby Hanover County. In his day, he cut a distinctive figure in the capital city, so much so that twenty-five years after his death the Richmond chronicler Samuel Mordecai could still paint a vivid portrait of our subject, reporting that he was

"a tall, raw-boned Quaker, who adhered strictly to the costume of his society. Friend Maddux was full six feet in stature, and his long strides and rapid gait might have indicated that he inherited the boots of Jack the giant-killer – he strode about four feet at each step, and slung his body and arms with a vim to keep pace with his legs."

The one imprint that ties Maddox to Virginia's print trade is the Richmond directory that he compiled in 1818 and published in 1819: *The Richmond Directory, Register, and Almanac, for the Year 1819*. Being the city's first such guide, Maddox was challenged at every turn in writing it, as his Introduction noted, reporting that the work

"was indeed laborious, and many obstacles have presented themselves which have been the means of delaying the first year's publication to a very late period. The want of numbers on the houses, which has been considered by some as a great objection to the work, has been overcome, by the manner in which their situations has been described, as will be seen by the reference at the beginning of the Directory."

Though he clearly meant the work to be an annual production, the 1819 edition was the only one that Maddox published, and such a guide was not attempted again until 1845.

Maddox was tied to Virginia's printing establishment in other, less obvious ways, through his agency work. In July 1814, he was engaged by Samuel K. Jennings (236), late editor of the *Lynchburg Press*, as one of his two Richmond agents who offered one of his patented "Portable Hot Baths" as a charitable benefit for the city's poor – an unexpectedly humane pursuit for someone Mordecai termed "a severe dun." That characteristic was essential in his other print-trade connection; from late 1814 on, Maddox was the business agent for Deborah W. L. Pleasants (328) as she sold off and settled the substantial estate of her late husband, the printer-publisher Samuel Pleasants (331). Maddox often ran advertisements in Richmond's papers offering for rent Pleasants's various residential properties in the city until his estate was finally settled in the early 1820s. In November 1818, he published an extraordinary notice that detailed the multiple responsibilities he had taken on for that estate: distributor of the *Statutes at Large* by William Waller Hening (213), as well as for Hening's *Revised Code of Virginia* (1814); local agent for Hezekiah Niles's *Weekly Register* out of Baltimore and for the Boston republication of the London-issued *Christian Observer* magazine; subscription agent for his own *Richmond Directory*; sales and collection agent for Jennings's therapeutic-bath business; and keeper of a small lending library that was once owned by Pleasants.

When Maddox died in 1834, notices of his passing in the city's papers were exceedingly brief, reflecting his Quaker simplicity and reserve. But Mordecai later told an instructive tale of his moral and ethical standards. Maddox became a friend to the English actress Frances Willems Green; she had been abandoned in Richmond by her husband, John William Green, a principal in the theatrical troupe of Placide & Green; husband and wife had been a part of the featured performance on the night of the Richmond Theater Fire in December 1811, a catastrophe that took the life of their only child, Nancy; finding "Mrs. Green" one day in a "desolate condition – a childless mother and deserted wife," Maddox discovered that she had not sought the solace of her faith and so offered to escort her to church the following Sunday, though she was Episcopalian and he a Quaker. Their joint appearance in St. John's Church on Church Hill presented the odd sight of a "tall and ungainly Quaker, with the pale and delicate actress arrayed in weeds, leaning on his arm." The stir that appearance caused brought criticism of Maddox's actions the next day. He responded by saying simply:

"I carried a poor, desolate sinner to hear the word of God, but I do assure thee I saw many there who stared at *her*, that required the word as much as that poor soul did."

Clearly, Maddox led a principled life fitting both his religious roots and personal integrity. And his unique publication has given later generations a clear view of his beloved city.

Personal Data

Born: Jan. 16 1777 Hanover County, Virginia.

Died: July 22 1834 Henrico County, Virginia.

Died unmarried and never had children.

Sources: Imprint (S/S 49292); Hinshaw, *American Quaker Genealogy*; Mordecai, *By-Gone Days*; notices in Richmond's *Virginia Argus* (1811-16) and *Commercial Compiler* (1816-22).