

276 MADERA, NICHOLAS B. – [NICHOLAS BIERLY MADERA]

Publisher

Morgantown

Publisher of *The Monongalia Spectator* at Morgantown (1816-19) with William McGranahan (276) and Ralph Berkshire (032), and later of *The North Western Journal* (1822) with James M. Barbour (020) there.

Madera was a key figure in the early development of Morgantown as a commercial center for both Monongalia County and the southern Monongahela River basin. He was a native of Reading, Pennsylvania, the son of Revolutionary War veteran Christian Madera (1757-1822) and his wife Ann Bierly (1755-1838); his immediate family was part of an extensive kinship group in Pennsylvania who had taken their surname from the Madeira Islands, from whence their ancestors had been exiled for their Protestant faith in the sixteenth century. After the Revolution, his father moved the family south to Shenandoah County, taking up residence near Woodstock, so causing some nineteenth-century historians to report that Nicholas had been born in Virginia. About 1796, they moved again, this time crossing the Alleghenies to Monongalia County, as then did many Pennsylvania war veterans.

In Morgantown, the young Madera emerged as a building-contractor, land speculator, and tavern-keeper. In 1804, he married a daughter of another Reading family who had relocated to Morgantown, Susannah Trinkel; together they produced a family of eighteen children, although all did not survive childhood. The next year, his sister Elizabeth married Zackquill Morgan Jr., eldest son of Morgantown's namesake and founder. Thus his employments and his relatives made Madera an important person in the growing town; but it was the War of 1812 that finally brought him into its leadership circle. After serving in Col. John Evans's 2nd Regiment of the Virginia Militia (as a Quartermaster Sergeant), Madera was elected in 1816 as a trustee of the Corporation of Morgantown – known as the Common Council – a post that he then held until 1838.

By then, Madera (among others) had come to believe that, if Morgantown was to thrive in the future, it needed to offer a county paper. A previous attempt, *The Monongalia Gazette*, had struggled through a six-year existence before closing in September 1810. It had faced the dominance of Pittsburgh's papers, published just 70 miles to the north and carried by the mail stage that passed through the neighborhood. Only a local mercantile journal could break the town's dependence on those distant advertisers to promote its various businesses and services. So Madera joined with Ralph Berkshire, a dry-goods merchant and pottery manufacturer, who was also a justice on the county court, to bring a new weekly advertiser to Morgantown. Their search for a practical printer to produce such a paper for them put them in contact with a Scots-Irish immigrant then working in Philadelphia as a journeyman, William McGranahan. He agreed to come to Morgantown to operate a press office financed by the two businessmen; the firm that they formed was "Wm. McGranahan & Co." But no one in town could have thought that the printer was the central figure in this arrangement; the "Co." ruled here, and such was clearly evident when the press was set up in a shop adjacent to Berkshire's store. Their *Monongalia Spectator* first issued in September 1816.

The *Spectator* apparently fared no better than had the preceding *Gazette*. The scarcity of

specie in rural America was always the bane of a newspaper's existence in these years, and Morgantown's early papers were no exception. After two years of effort, looking for a way to enhance its revenues with new paying customers. Madera and Berkshire asked James Pindall, the county's new Federalist representative in Congress, for help; he now began to lobby the U.S Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, to assign to their *Spectator* one of Virginia's three licenses to print the laws passed by Congress in the designated newspaper's pages – at the established rate for advertising. Any journal receiving such a contract received a substantial subsidy for its publication. Madera and Berkshire wanted it for their paper and Pindall was the means to that end. They were no doubt happy when Adams awarded their *Spectator* such a plum in late 1818.

Prospects for a long continuation of their weekly journal now seemed assured. The federal subsidy restored the firm's fiscal stability, just as job-printing apparently began to increase. But in spring 1819, the merchants had a falling out with their printer. Legend reports that:

"Regularly, once a week, on the day that the paper was struck off, McGranahan called on 'Uncle Nick' [Madera] for money to buy whiskey to thin the printing ink. For a long time it was cheerfully furnished, until one day 'Uncle Nick' concluded to visit the office, and see how things were getting on, when his righteous soul was greatly vexed within him, to find his working partner lying under the printing press dead drunk."

As a result, Madera and Berkshire terminated their agreement with the immigrant almost immediately. Whether the story is true or not, McGranahan left Morgantown abruptly in May 1819 for Clarksburg, where he started a new journal that August, the ironically-titled *Independent Virginian*.

Madera and Berkshire soon found that the split had doomed the *Spectator*. After he left town, the printer wrote to Adams informing him of the firm's dissolution, his relocation, and his readiness to continue serving Congress; Adams evidently agreed to McGranahan's plan, as when the next session of Congress met, its laws were published in Clarksburg and not in Morgantown; it was McGranahan who held the license to publish the laws, as the titular head of the company, not Madera or Berkshire. However, the two businessmen did not go down without a fight, enlisting John G. Jackson, the U.S. District Court judge in Clarksburg (and Pindall's predecessor in Congress) to dispute McGranahan's continuation as the law publisher in Virginia's western region; Jackson relied on character assassination in his letter, openly attacking the printer's virtue, suggesting that the oft-repeated legend was true; but Jackson's appeal fell on deaf ears, as later events show. Without a practical printer, and with the major economic crisis of 1819 then setting in, Madera and Berkshire faced a *fait accompli* – their *Spectator* was dead.

It took more than a year for a new advertiser to arise in Morgantown, but Madera was not a part of that venture. In late December 1820, the short-lived *Monongalia Herald* of James M. Barbour (020) and William Barbour (021) – either brothers or a father and son team – made its first appearance there. The pair had been warned by McGranahan not to trust anyone in Morgantown, as they reported in that first issue; but they had proceeded with the *Herald* anyway, even though the track record for such ventures was "almost sufficient to operate as a bug-a-boo" for them. In the end, however, their experience was like that of their

predecessors; the *Herald* had ceased its publication by the following July – a six-month run. Still, James Barbour remained in Morgantown, operating a job-printing office there while waiting for another opportunity to publish a weekly advertiser. In 1822, Madera provided him with that opportunity.

Madera had evidently learned from his prior journalistic experience. Recognizing the need for a reliable distribution system for a western newspaper, as well as for better connections with distant newspaper publishers for information and exposure, he applied to Postmaster-General Return J. Meigs, Jr., a former governor of Ohio, for appointment as Morgantown's postmaster; he was so named in March 1822 and held that prized post until 1853 (his son Francis followed suit, serving as the town's postmaster during the Civil War). In anticipation of that appointment, and its exchange privileges for newspaper publishers, Madera formed a partnership with Barbour to publish the weekly *North-Western Journal*; their journal made its first appearance just two weeks before Madera formally became postmaster. But like the earlier newspapers, their new *Journal* was short-lived as well, ceasing publication in either October or November of 1822. Morgantown would not see another such weekly until 1825. Evidently this market town's proximity to Pittsburgh made publishing a paper impractical, at least until its population had grown significantly larger; in the late 1810s and early 1820s, it could sustain job-printing, but not a weekly mercantile advertiser.

After the *Journal* closed, Madera never published a newspaper again, although he may have been an unnamed backer in later attempts. Rather, he focused on his responsibilities as a businessman, councilor, and postmaster. Eventually, he would retire from his public roles as his age advanced – leaving the Common Council in 1838 at age fifty-nine and the post-office in 1853 at seventy-four – but he kept a hand in his private business activities until shortly before his death in 1857. Madera's long and prolific life made him a central character in the late-nineteenth-century histories of the town and the county, even as their many authors repeatedly reported erroneous dates and places in their biographies of him.

Personal Data

Born:	Nov. 18	1779	Reading, Berks County, Pennsylvania.
Married:	Nov. 25	1804	Susannah Trinkel @ Monongalia County, VA/WV
Died:	May 21	1857	Morgantown, Monongalia County, VA/WV
Children:	Elizabeth (b. 1804); Charles (b. 1805); Ann (b. 1807); Andrew (b. 1809); Julia (b. 1809); Francis (b. 1810); Mary Rebecca (b. 1812); Henry Clarence (b. 1813); Ann (b. 1818); Charlotte (b. 1819); Henry (b. 1820); Aaron (b. 1822); Harriet (b. 1825); Mary (b. 1827); Albert (b. 1829); Andrew (b. 1832); William (b. 1833); Rufus (b. 1836).		

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Norona & Shetler; Callahan, *Morgantown*; Core, *Monongalia Story*; Wiley, *Monongalia County*; *War of 1812 Service Records*; Papers of Dept. of Sec. of State (National Archive RG 59.2); Federal Decennial Census, 1820-50; genealogical data from Madera family charts posted on Ancestry.com (December 2012).