

280 MARTIN

Bookseller & Librarian

Norfolk

Proprietor of the Steam Boat Hotel Reading Room in Norfolk (1820-21) in partnership with Hamilton Shields (380) and Henry Ashburn (015), proprietors of the *American Beacon*.

Martin is an enigmatic figure, as no record of his given name has yet been found, making it essentially impossible to trace him. He could have been one of the Martin brothers, Joseph and James, who conducted bookselling and bindery businesses in the 1810s in Georgetown and Baltimore; he could also have been George A. Martin (281), publisher of the successive *Daily Courier* and *Mercantile Advertiser* in Petersburg, a lineage that ceased publication in early 1817. But without more evidence, such identifications are speculative at best.

By early 1820, Martin had become the manager of the Steam Boat Hotel Reading Room in Norfolk, the city's first merchant-information-exchange business; that subscription library had attained an influential standing in the seaports of the Atlantic world as a result of its management by William G. Lyford (272) between 1810 and 1816; he left the concern to open an autonomous Commercial Reading and News Room, which remained in competition with his former employer until 1828, when he was called to Baltimore to conduct a similar business. After 1816, the separate ownership and management of the Steam Boat Reading Room fluctuated, almost annually. In 1820, Martin was reported as its manager, and in July 1821, he became a partner to Hamilton Shields and Henry Ashburn, owners of the *American Beacon*, when they acquired the business. With the published notice of that transaction, however, Martin makes his last appearance in print, leaving his fate an open question.

No Personal Data yet discovered.

Sources: Notices published in Norfolk's *American Beacon* (1817-21).