

## 285 McARTHUR, JOHN

**Printer & Publisher**

**Staunton**

Printer and publisher of the *Political Mirror or The Scourge of Aristocracy* at Staunton (1800-02), initially with James Lyon (274), his cousin.

McArthur was a practical printer who became a part of an effort by Republican leaders to build a network of newspapers in Virginia supporting Jefferson's election in 1800. He came to Virginia in early 1800 to conduct the weekly planned for Staunton, serving as the local tradesman for the paper's Richmond-based editor, James Lyon.

Lyon was the eldest son of Matthew Lyon, the Vermont printer-publisher turned Republican congressman who was prosecuted under the Alien & Sedition Acts for a campaign pamphlet that he had issued in 1798; while imprisoned, Lyon was reelected to Congress, as son James ran his press office in his absence. Matthew Lyon was also McArthur's uncle; his mother was a sister to Lyon's second wife, both daughters of Thomas Chittenden (1730-97), Vermont's first governor. He was trained as a printer in Lyon's Fair Haven office and aided son James in running that press during the father's imprisonment. James Lyon was invited to Richmond to manage the planned newspaper campaign there as a result of his efforts in Vermont and his family's impeccable Republican credentials. McArthur was compelled to join his cousin in Virginia in 1800 after he led a group of Matthew Lyon's adolescent supporters in girdling trees in an orchard owned by Lyon's principal Federalist adversary in Fair Haven. Knowing McArthur's capabilities, Lyon dispatched his sixteen-year-old cousin to Staunton, entrusting his new *Political Mirror or The Scourge of Aristocracy* to a dependable family member.

McArthur faced enormous resistance in Staunton, publishing the first Republican paper in a well-known Federalist bastion. Regional party leaders recognized the *Mirror's* tenuous fiscal foundation and moved to find renewed support for it after Lyon withdrew from the journal in mid-1800, some six months into its run. With Jefferson's inauguration, Augusta lawyer John Monroe – then U.S. Attorney for the western district of Virginia and a cousin of James Monroe – asked the secretary of state, James Madison, to grant McArthur one of Virginia's three licenses to publish the laws passed by Congress each session; when he received such a grant, McArthur was able to continue the *Political Mirror* through the first session of the Seventh Congress (Dec. 7, 1801 to May 3, 1802). But a dearth of paying advertisers and subscribers brought the paper to an end shortly thereafter.

For the next decade. McArthur's employments and residences are uncertain. The closing of his Staunton weekly coincided with Matthew Lyon's relocation of both his family and press from Vermont to Kentucky, so he may have joined his uncle there as a journeyman. It may also be that he moved on to the Missouri Territory following the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, given his subsequent residence at Ste. Genevieve on the Mississippi, downstream from the Lyons family complex at the confluence of the Cumberland and Ohio rivers. What is clear is that when the War of 1812 erupted, McArthur was a lieutenant in the Territorial Militia unit raised at Ste. Genevieve and remained in service until the war's end. He then returned to that old French river port to go into business and politics there.

In 1816, McArthur ran for a seat in the Territorial Legislature, as many militia veterans did after the war. But McArthur's campaign was unique in that he killed his opponent. That foe was Auguste De Mun, the son of an eminent French settler, who accused McArthur of being involved with a ring of counterfeiters – an unproved charge that gained credibility from his print-trade background. McArthur challenged De Mun to a duel over the accusation, but De Mun refused on the grounds that McArthur was not a gentleman and so not entitled to the challenge. However as the campaign continued, and McArthur repeatedly called De Mun a coward, the situation changed. On August 28, 1816, a well-armed De Mun set out with his brother-in-law to find and kill McArthur. On finding him in the town square, in the company of his brother-in-law, Lewis Linn (a future U.S. Senator from Missouri), a furious gun fight between the two pairings erupted; McArthur and Linn withdrew to the safety of a nearby tavern, with De Mun in pursuit; as the Frenchman entered the tavern, he was shot dead, ostensibly by McArthur. An inquest found no reason to prosecute McArthur for De Mun's death, and so he was elected to the legislature the following October. Yet he did not serve as an elected representative in any territorial or state legislature thereafter.

In early 1819, McArthur was appointed clerk of the legislature's House of Representatives in the session that addressed the parameters of Missouri statehood; it was his last appearance in public office. When the borders of the proposed state were drawn during that session, McArthur moved to make himself an important figure in the new territory that would now be formed between Louisiana and Missouri: Arkansas. He wrote to secretary of state John Quincy Adams, asking that he be granted the sole license in that new territory for publishing the laws passed by Congress during the coming winter, citing his Staunton experience as his recommendation. Adams agreed, but McArthur was soon deprived of that sinecure. As he now lacked a functional press, he had to find one for this venture; in doing so, though, he discovered that a press was already on its way to the expected territorial capital of Arkansas Post, a trading settlement at the mouth of the Arkansas River. That press was in the hands of William Woodruff, a printer from Brooklyn, New York, who had embarked for the west that summer expecting that he would set up shop in Nashville, Louisville, or St. Louis; but when the Arkansas Territory became a reality, Woodruff continued on down the Mississippi to "the Post" to establish that territory's first press and paper. McArthur was surprised by the unexpected rivalry, and rather than compete with Woodruff – and repeat his Staunton misadventure – he remained in Ste. Genevieve, so allowing Woodruff to assume his federal license. The first number of his *Arkansas Gazette* was issued on November 20, 1819, and remained in his hands as the principal newspaper in Arkansas until 1836.

McArthur lived out the rest of his life in Ste. Genevieve, engaged in a variety of businesses, including a tavern that he opened before 1830. He was well-connected there, a result of his marriage to Mary Ann Linn, a Kentucky-born daughter of a Virginia family, which put him close to the state's Democratic Party leadership. She was a sister of the aforementioned Dr. Lewis Fields Linn (1796-1843), U.S. senator from Missouri from 1833 to 1843, and half-sister of Gen. Henry Dodge (1782-1867), the Missouri cavalry leader made famous by the Black Hawk War, and subsequently named the first governor of the Wisconsin Territory, then the region immediately north of Missouri. That later matrimonial connection proved important to McArthur's family when he died unexpectedly in 1836. Lacking the financial resources to

continue alone, Mary McArthur took their children to live at Dodge's residence in Burlington (now Iowa) for the next few years. Thus, McArthur's life fell into the shadows of his better known marital relations.

Still, McArthur made noteworthy contributions to American history through his sons' lives. William Pope McArthur (1814-50) attended the forerunner of the U.S. Naval Academy in Norfolk – utilizing an appointment obtained by his uncle Linn – and led the first Coast & Geodetic Survey of the Northwest coast after the Mexican War, though died on his return home from the expedition. Joseph Hunter McArthur (1825-1902) trained at West Point – via an appointment gained by his uncle Dodge – and served in various cavalry units in the West; he rose to the rank of major during the Civil War, but was stricken with typhoid during McClellan's Peninsula Campaign, relegating him to administrative duties in Washington until his retirement at war's end.

### ***Personal Data***

Born:	In	1784	Fair Haven, Vermont.
Married:	In	1812	Mary Ann Linn @ Ste. Genevieve, Missouri Terr.
Died:	In	1836	Ste. Genevieve, Missouri
Children:	William Pope (b. 1814); Henry Linn (b. 1816); Mary Theodosia (b. 1820); Joseph Hunter (b. 1825).		

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Rawson, "Guardians," chap. 6; Lucke, "First Arkansas Press" (1955); Papers of Dept. of Sec. of State (National Archive RG 59.2); Douglass, *History of Southeast Missouri* (1912); Smith & Rann, *History of Rutland County* (1886); genealogical data from Sons of the American Revolution Membership Applications (1889-1970), and the military academy biographies of sons William Pope (Navy) and Joseph Hunter (Army) McArthur.

On duel: several nineteenth-century historians misidentified John McArthur as William in this event, but all report correct familial relationships for John and his ensuing election to territorial legislature is seen in state records; several recent histories have uncritically repeated the error, such as Steward, *Duels and the Roots of Violence in Missouri* (2000), and Stepenoff, *From French Community to Missouri Town* (2006).