

286 McDONALD, DONALD

Printer

Norfolk

Printer of the *Virginia Gazette or Norfolk Intelligencer* (1774-75) with Alexander Cameron (076), William Duncan (151), Robert Gilmour (179), John Brown (056), and John Hunter Holt (223); was retained by Lord Dunmore (153) when the press was seized to publish his *Virginia Gazette* (1775-76), and went north with him in 1776.

McDonald was a practical printer who sought his fortune in North America but found only trouble and disappointment. Born in Scotland, probably in the early 1750s, he was trained to the trade there. In early 1774, he was invited to emigrate to Virginia as part of a group of Scottish printers who would establish the first press office and weekly newspaper in Norfolk. The project was initiated by William Duncan, a merchant of Scottish origin in the port; he recognized that the existing Williamsburg *Gazettes* were ever-more incapable of meeting the demand for advertising space and that the solution to that vexing problem was to publish a mercantile advertiser in that entrepôt. He persuaded printer Robert Gilmour to buy a complete press office for him in Scotland and bring it to Norfolk to produce such a journal. Gilmour brought with him two journeymen: McDonald and Alexander Cameron. Under the banner of William Duncan & Co. the trio issued their new *Norfolk Intelligencer* in June 1774 and found immediate acceptance in the town.

However, all four tradesmen, like many of their Scottish brethren there, found themselves on the wrong side of the political divide emerging in America; most revolutionary leaders in Virginia viewed the port-town as a "damned nest of Tories" and so closely monitored the activities of immigrant merchants and craftsmen. In January 1775, Duncan ran afoul of local efforts to enforce trade restrictions that were part of the Continental Association of 1774, one of the first measures of resistance to imperial authority authorized by the Continental Congress. Duncan was forced to yield control of his office and paper to another merchant, one John Brown, even as Gilmour remained owner of the press. Brown did not long control the journal either, as he was found guilty of importing slaves in violation of the Association's ban on such in March 1775. By that time, patriot leaders had arranged for a new proprietor to take over the new *Intelligencer*, someone whose politics were more to their liking. They brought in John Hunter Holt, son of the patriot printer of New York, who had once been a Williamsburg merchant. McDonald and Cameron were now employed producing a journal that did not reflect their political views.

Holt would not long control the *Intelligencer* either, though he ran afoul of imperial dictates rather than continental ones. Lord Dunmore, Virginia's last royal governor, had fled from Williamsburg shortly after Holt arrived in Norfolk, a result of his plan for suppressing the nascent rebellion in Virginia being leaked to a Williamsburg paper; through that summer, Dunmore and his wandering administration operated from ships anchored off Norfolk, drawing withering commentaries from Holt in his weekly paper. At the end of September, after a particularly coarse assault on the character of one of Dunmore's lieutenants, the governor ordered Holt arrested and his office seized. The governor snared the press alone, but acquired two willing printers for that press in McDonald and Cameron. For the next six

months, the two journeymen worked on board a ship in Dunmore's "fleet" off Norfolk, producing job-printing for his "official" government, as well as a newspaper, the *Virginia Gazette*, "printed by Authority," serving Dunmore's need for an official voice.

Such a water-borne enterprise could not last long. Dunmore sailed for New York City, now in the hands of British forces, in August 1776, taking McDonald, Cameron, and Gilmour's press with him. Once there, the men were employed by Sir William Howe, commander-in-chief of British forces in North America, as printers to his growing army – at Lord Dunmore's recommendation. It was a position the pair retained until 1782, though not always in New York. In 1777, they attended Howe on his campaign to occupy Philadelphia and operated Gilmour's press there from September 1777 to June 1778; they returned to New York that fall with Howe, though they left the now-badly-damaged press in Philadelphia. Finding new tools in New York, Cameron & McDonald printed for the British army there until about May 1780 when they joined Howe's successor, Sir Henry Clinton, in his assault on Charleston, South Carolina. Their stay in Charleston was fully two-and-a-half years long, allowing them to publish an official paper there, the *Royal South-Carolina Gazette*, in alliance with another Loyalist printer, James Robertson, formerly of Albany. When British forces finally evacuated Charleston in 1782, after the Yorktown surrender and as peace talks continued in Paris, the two printers returned to New York, leaving Robertson to settle matters in South Carolina.

McDonald and Cameron now looked to new prospects elsewhere, anticipating the British evacuation of New York City. As Cameron would eventually join with John Wells, a Loyalist printer that the two had met in Charleston, in printing a "royal" gazette for the new colonial administration of the Bahamas, McDonald was likely a part of those negotiations in the fall of 1782. But he would not join Cameron and Wells there, for shortly after returning to New York, McDonald took ill and died unexpectedly on October 5, 1782. His obituary published in a Loyalist paper noted that McDonald was "a gentleman of inoffensive manners and had a native goodness of heart." Still nothing is known of him outside the bibliographic record.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1755 Scotland
Died: Oct. 5 1782 Newton, Long Island, New York.

No record of wife or family yet discovered.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Siebert, "Confiscated Revolutionary Press;" Hildeburn, *Printers and Printing in Colonial New York*; Sabine, *Sketched of Loyalists*; Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exile*.