

292 MCKENNIE, C. P. – [CLEMENT PYNES MCKENNIE]

Publisher

Charlottesville

Publisher of *Central Gazette* (1820-27) at Charlottesville with brother J. H. McKennie (293); possibly partner to James Caldwell (071) in *Palladium of Liberty* (1818-19) at Warrenton.

In most Virginia histories, whether trade or geographical, Clement P. McKennie is reported as simply being the print-trade side of a partnership with his financier brother John Harris as publishers of the first paper issued in Charlottesville – *The Central Gazette*. But a thorough review of contemporaneous newspapers reveals that accepted account is incorrect.

The two men were the oldest sons of Matthew McKennie, a Fauquier County physician who died in Warrenton in 1812. His widow Mary was left the task of providing for at least three minor children at that time, and so bound out their eldest son, John Harris, to Winchester publisher Jonathan Foster (168); hence, J. H. McKennie was more than a financial resource for his brother to draw on, likely as managing partner of their ensuing publishing venture. His brother fled Foster's employ in October 1817, apparently when Foster tried to compel him to remain in his office another two years, despite having reached his majority, and so the end of his indenture.

In March 1818, the publisher of the year-old *Palladium of Liberty* in Warrenton, James Caldwell, took on a partner identified only as "McKennie." Given that Caldwell had trained the elder McKennie brother in Winchester, this unnamed partner was most likely John H. McKennie. Still, other family members may have been that partner as well, or the family collectively; their mother may have invested some of the father's assets in Caldwell's paper as a way to provide for still-minor-son Beverley Randolph, perhaps as an apprentice; it may also be that Caldwell's partner was younger brother Clement, as he has frequently been identified as the tradesman in the McKennie brothers' ensuing Charlottesville venture. Since the partnership with Caldwell lasted just a year, the McKennie involved was almost certainly one of the Charlottesville pair, as the sale of that interest in the *Palladium of Liberty* in March 1819 would have readily provided the means to start a new weekly elsewhere.

It is interesting to note that a newspaper that was financially troubled before this partner's investment then survived his withdrawal. In November 1818, Caldwell was granted one of three licenses given to Virginia newspapers to publish the laws of Congress in their pages at their going advertising rate – a substantial subsidy for any publisher having such a license; moreover, it was the one previously held by Jonathan Foster, and its withdrawal compelled him to sell his weekly that winter. At the time of the grant, the McKennie brothers owned Albemarle County farms, near the Fauquier County border, neighboring the estate of James Monroe, the president of the United States who approved such licenses at that time. In now holding that license, Caldwell could buy out his unidentified partner in March 1819 when a year-long contract would have expired, and still continue to publish a marginal weekly. Thus it is also unsurprising that the McKennie brothers filed an application for that same license once their Charlottesville paper became a reality.

Monroe was not the only president whose patronage the McKennie brothers sought. Their

decision to start publishing their *Central Gazette* in January 1820 was tied to the opening of the University of Virginia, originally termed the Central College at Charlottesville – so their choice of title. The establishment of that institution had long been advocated by Thomas Jefferson, who now lived in retirement on his "little mountain" above the town. Hence the McKennies presented the public with a Jeffersonian newspaper, a weekly supported initially by the "Sage of Monticello" himself, one which conformed to his views rather than to those of the broader Democratic-Republican community.

While conducted by the brothers – as the firm of C. P. McKennie & J. H. McKennie – their office employed four additional hands and circulated about 400 copies per issue at the outset, realizing an annual-gross-revenue of about \$4000. After the first year, brother John withdrew from the partnership, leaving Clement as the *Gazette's* sole proprietor until 1827. That July, in anticipation of a brutal political campaign the following year, McKennie sold his press and paper to Thomas W. Gilmer, then his editor, and his new partner, John A.G. Davis. Gilmer & Davis renamed the paper *The Virginia Advocate*, and it continued until summer 1861 when the disruptions of the Civil War forced its suspension; it was never restarted.

McKennie retired to his Albemarle County farm with the sale of the *Central Gazette*, likely to reorganize his family's finances in light of his brother's recent removal to the Mississippi Territory. But the sale did not terminate his interest in the print trade. Rather, in 1834 he purchased the main bookstore in Charlottesville, adjacent to the University, from the estate of its founder W. G. Garner; he conducted that store until his death in 1856, and from about 1840 onward as a partnership with his son Marcellus.

Personal Data

Born: Apr. 14 1798 Orlean, Fauquier County, Virginia.
Married in 1822 Henrietta Rodes @ Albemarle County, Virginia.
Died: Jan. 3 1856 Charlottesville, Virginia.
Children: Marcellus Matthew (1824-90); no other recorded offspring found.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Cappon; *Bicentennial History of Fauquier County*; Moore, *Albemarle*; Woods, *Albemarle*; genealogical data from McKennie family charts posted on Ancestry.com (August 2012).