

294 McLAUGHLIN, NATHANIEL

295 McLAUGHLIN, WILLIAM F.

Publishers & Papermakers

Petersburg

Philadelphia-based printers associated with John L. Cook (105) publishing the *Virginia Apollo* (1807) at Petersburg; also operated a paper mill there (1807-08).

Nathaniel and William F. McLaughlin were brothers, apparently, trained in the print trade at Philadelphia. For at least a decade – 1801 to 1811 – William conducted a successful bookstore there, which seems to have then been the source for financing joint business ventures with Nathaniel in Petersburg. As a result, it is likely that William never resided in Virginia, with Nathaniel living there only for the duration of those concerns. Their origin is uncertain, although a preoccupation with the history and culture of Ireland in imprints William issued in Philadelphia suggests that they were Irish émigrés who came to America in the 1790s.

Nathaniel's initial venture in Petersburg was with Virginia-native John L. Cook in publishing his short-lived *Virginia Apollo*. Cook was trained in Richmond's printing offices before he became a mainstay with the press of Meriwether Jones (242), Virginia's public printer from 1798 to 1804; after Jones's office was broken up in mid-1804, Cook relocated to Baltimore to publish a daily paper with George Bourne (043), an English evangelical minister who then needed employment while seeking an American pulpit; but their journal foundered quickly and Cook returned to Richmond as a job-printer after selling the paper in late 1805. There he was approached by McLaughlin about publishing a paper that would promote domestic manufacturing, so as to keep the country independent of Britain's economic influence, rather than continue to import foreign goods, as Federalist merchants preferred. With Cook looking for a new journalistic venture, he promptly agreed to McLaughlin's proposition.

The resulting firm of McLaughlin & Cook issued the first number of their new *Virginia Apollo* on April 15, 1807. In publishing the *Apollo*, the partners knew that their twice-weekly paper would immediately be in competition with the town's established partisan newspapers: the Federalist *Petersburg Intelligencer* of John Dickson (134) and the *Petersburg Republican* of Edward Pescud (324). But it appears that the two were not anticipating competition from another Republican weekly, one that issued its first number just one week later: the *Virginia Mercury* of James L. Edwards (156) and Cincinnatus Stith (403); thus, almost from the start, that less-expensive weekly paper undermined the potential market for their more-costly twice-weekly one.

Yet it appears that a larger problem was competition for the raw materials for the new paper mill that McLaughlin also planned – rags – and newspaper publishing diverted him from properly pursuing that business. In the winter of 1806-07, the mill that was the main paper supplier for all of Petersburg's newspapers was destroyed in a fire; that event likely initiated the McLaughlin brothers' plan for a Petersburg mill, as only one other paper-mill then existed in all of Virginia. So in support of their effort, Charles Donaldson, apparently the merchant they had designated as their rag collector, placed a long advertisement in one of the *Apollo's* early issues, with the headline:

"MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS MIGHT BE SAVED IN VIRGINIA, By only preserving those old and apparently useless **RAGS** which are now suffered to rot and be destroyed as if they were of no manner of use to mankind."

The advertisement, however, was plagiarized, taken without attribution from the April 18th issue of the *Impartial Observer* of Samuel Brooks (054) in Richmond; on May 16th, Brooks reprinted the original notice with a comment chastising Donaldson for the blatant misuse of someone else's writings for his own personal enrichment. But the real problem, it seems, was that the Richmond notice was penned by Jacob Johnson (237), the Virginia-based half of the Philadelphia bookselling firm of Johnson & Warner; Johnson was attempting to move Virginia rags north to the Pennsylvania mills that provided paper for their firm there. Now Donaldson was using Johnson's text to divert those rags to the not-yet-open McLaughlin mill in Petersburg, depriving him (and likely Brooks) of the benefit his sizeable literary effort.

The complaint reflects the mounting competition between two Philadelphia-born concerns in their concurrent attempts to tap into Virginia's markets, one where the McLaughlins were at a disadvantage against the better capitalized firm of Johnson & Warner. So by the end of May 1807, the brothers were forced to choose between the newspaper and the paper mill, and the *Virginia Apollo* lost out to the planned manufacturing effort. The *Apollo* issued its last number on May 30th, announcing that it would be moved to Norfolk, suggesting that Cook was willing to continue the venture there. But that plan was apparently abandoned, as the paper was never issued there, with Cook returning to Richmond by early 1808. It may be that the commotion experienced in Norfolk after the Chesapeake-Leopard affair just three weeks after the *Apollo* closed (June 22, 1807) ended the move.

Meanwhile, the new paper-mill – called Battersea – opened less than a month later under the management of Nathaniel & William F. McLaughlin. The roster of the mill's supporters evinces the wisdom of their choice; it included John Dickson of the *Intelligencer* and John Daly Burk, who was then drafting his *History of Virginia* outside the city. That opening even encouraged the Federalist Dickson to call for similar investments in local manufacturing in the pages of his journal, leading to the creation of a "Manufacturing Society of Petersburg" which eventually built other mills along the Appomattox. So despite its brevity, the *Virginia Apollo* did have a hand in boosting domestic manufacturing in the Southside, as intended.

The McLaughlins, however, were not a part of those later industrial endeavors. About a year after they opened their Battersea mill, they sold the establishment to John Banister, who would give the mill its better-known name of Banister's Mill. Nathaniel apparently returned to Philadelphia as a job-printer in William's bookstore, although that course is assumed, as he does not appear in either the bibliographic or historical record again. William evinces a similar disappearance once his Philadelphia bookstore closed in 1811.

No Personal Data yet discovered.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Brown, *Philadelphia Book Trade Directory*; Wyatt, *Checklist for Petersburg*; Seagrave, *Artisans & Mechanics*; Scott & Wyatt, *Petersburg's Story*, notices in both *Petersburg Intelligencer* and *Petersburg Republican* (1807-08).