

### 300 McRAE, ALEXANDER G.

**Publisher**

**Clarksburg**

Publisher of *Western Virginian* (1815-17) at Clarksburg with Gideon Butler (067), and later of the *Clarksburg Gazette* (1822-23) and *Clarksburg Intelligencer* (1823-27).

McRae has left only a short trace in the historical and bibliographic record, extending just a dozen years. His first appearance is in November 1815 when Clarksburg's *Western Virginian* began publication. That paper issued after the death of the *Bye Stander* of Forbes (053) and Alexander Britton (052). Earlier that year, the brothers had closed their journal, the town's first, facing overwhelming debts and declining revenues, as well as its association with the local Federalist faction headed by James Pindall, bother-in-law to Forbes Britton

The *Western Virginian* made its appearance within weeks, probably that November, published by McRae and Gideon Butler. The rapid succession suggests that McRae & Butler were local figures who secured the use of the Brittons' press, probably through a lease, and began publishing their version of Harrison County's journal of record. All that is known of the paper has been derived from a single surviving 1816 issue, now lost, and references to it in other journals. The new weekly was a Republican journal supporting John G. Jackson, a Clarksburg lawyer and mill-owner then representing the First District (Virginia west of the Appalachian ridge) in Congress – and a brother-in-law to Dolley Madison. Yet within a few months of the paper's launch, Jackson had declined to run for reelection in 1816; he was then more interested in an effort in the state's western counties to amend and democratize the 1776 Virginia Constitution (leading to the Staunton Convention that August) and in refitting his war-weakened business; he also recognized the effects of popular anger over the Compensation Act of 1816, which increased the pay of Congressmen. By February 1817, the drive to amend the Constitution had been blunted in the General Assembly by the eastern counties, and Jackson was about to yield his seat in Congress to Federalist James Pindall. McRae evidently decided to retire from the venture at this point, and Butler announced that the *Western Virginian* would be transformed into the *Republican Compiler* on April 1st – possibly the end date of a simple six-month agreement between the two proprietors.

McRae remained in Clarksburg, indicating that he was the skilled labor that helped to make the Clarksburg presses viable. He may have been employed by William McGranahan (288) in producing McGranahan's *Independent Virginian*.; he may also have conducted a job-printing office (with either the Britton or Butler press) after the demise of *Republican Compiler* in July 1820. Either way, McRae clearly recovered from his first journalistic venture and found sufficient support to issue a second Republican paper in early 1822, the *Clarksburg Gazette*. And when McGranahan's license to publish the laws of Congress each year expired in 1824, McRae was there to act in his stead, holding that profitable subsidy until 1827, when he finally closed his paper, then called the *Clarksburg Intelligencer*. From the timing, it may be that McRae sold his business to Joseph Israel, who started his *Clarksburg Enquirer* shortly thereafter, but the record is unclear.

With the closing of his *Intelligencer*, McRae also disappears from the print trade, leaving his fate unknown, despite a well-recorded marriage there in 1824.

***Personal Data***

Married    April 22    1824    Susan O'Harra @ Harrison County, VA/WV

Died:        after    1827    Unknown

No other familial information yet discovered.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Norona & Shetler; Rice, "West Virginia Printers;" Haymond, *Harrison County*; Papers of Dept. of Sec. of State (National Archives RG 59.2).

Rice claims erroneously that this Clarksburg McRae is the Richmond lawyer/publisher Alexander McRae; but both leave distinct, mutually-exclusive traces, with the Richmonder removing to England in 1823.