

322 PELHAM, CHARLES – [later MAJOR CHARLES PELHAM]

Apprentice Printer

Williamsburg

Adolescent apprentice printer (1764) in the Williamsburg office of Joseph Royle (368).

Pelham was only briefly a part of the Virginia printing trade by serving an apprenticeship at the Williamsburg press of Joseph Royle, evidently ending in 1764 when he reached the age of seventeen. Given that date, and Royle's prolonged illness in that period, he was probably trained by Alexander Purdie (345), who was Royle's shop foreman then. Yet his print trade employment is essentially unknown, eclipsed by his later service in the Revolutionary War.

The apprentice was the second son of Peter Pelham (1721-1805), the noted musician who was the long-time organist at Williamsburg's Bruton Parish Church; his father was a son of the early Boston engraver of the same name (1695-1751) and half-brother of John Singleton Copley (1738-1815), the celebrated portrait artist. In about 1750, Pelham moved his young family to Virginia to take up the post at Bruton Parish; but as the family grew – to a total of fourteen children eventually – he was compelled to take on other employments, principally as a clerk to standing committees of the House of Burgesses and as keeper of the Publick Gaol (i.e. jail) during the Revolution. Charles was likely sent to join Royle in 1761, when the printer inherited the Williamsburg printing office from William Hunter Sr. (230), and when he was then the appropriate age for an apprentice: fourteen; but he is recorded there only in 1764, the first year in the sole surviving journal for Royle's business. And after that, he is not seen in town records again.

When war erupted in 1776, Pelham was living in Staunton, an urban locale that suggests he was then working in a mercantile setting. The connections he had forged in Williamsburg brought him a commission as a first lieutenant in the 1st Regiment of the Virginia Line that February; he was promoted to captain in that unit that November; his regiment saw frequent action in the northern battles from 1776 to 1779, including Great Bridge, Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine, Germantown, and Monmouth. In 1779, Pelham was transferred to the 2nd Regiment of the Virginia Line and promoted to major before it was dispatched to defend Charleston South Carolina. As a result, he was among the many Virginians captured when the city fell in May 1780, and so remained a prisoner of war until 1783.

After his discharge, Pelham travelled to North Carolina, where he had met the daughter of a Caswell County planter during the war; he married Isabella Atkinson there in September 1784. Shortly thereafter, the couple removed to Mason County, Kentucky, where Pelham acquired more than 6000 acres of land with warrants issued in consequence of his military service. They remained there for the rest of their lives. Yet his life as a farmer on the banks of the Ohio River were fraught with problems, leading to Pelham applying for a federal military pension in 1823 – when seventy-five – claiming considerable indebtedness and just a ninety acre freehold which left him unable to support four unmarried daughters, two minor sons, two grandsons, and his fifty-seven year-old wife. He received a monthly pension of \$20, back-dated to 1818 (when the enabling act was passed), which evidently sustained him until his death in August 1829. His widow continued to receive that pension, increased

to \$50 per month in 1848, until her death in 1851.

The couple's contribution to American history did not end there. Their fourth son, Atkinson, fathered Major John Pelham (1838-63), a Confederate artillery officer who served in J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry, often credited with perfecting the use of horse-drawn light-artillery.

Personal Data

Born: July 11 1747 Boston, Massachusetts
Married Sept. 22 1784 Isabella Atkinson @ Caswell County, No. Carolina.
Died: Aug. 29 1829 Maysville, Mason County, Kentucky.
Children: Eleven total: Peter (1785-1826); Elizabeth (b. 1786); Sarah (b. 1788); Charles Holles (1790-1880); Martha (b. 1794) William (1798-1870); Atkinson (1799-1880); Penelope (1800-94); Richard Henry (b. 1802); John (b. 1805); and Ann Creese (b. 1808).

Sources: Royle Journal ([*Virginia Gazette Daybook*], 1764-66), University of Virginia; Colonial Williamsburg biography of Peter Pelham; Goodwin. *Bruton Parish Church*. Revolutionary War Pension applications (W3034, 1828); Gwathmey, *Virginians in the Revolution*; biography in *The Cannoneer* (Ft. Sill, OK), II: 2.