

### 323 PERKINS, JOHN H.

**Printer & Publisher**

**Petersburg**

Publisher of *The American Star* (1818) at Petersburg with Marvel W. Dunnivant (154).

Perkins was a journeyman printer who was briefly a part of the Virginia print trade in early 1818 in Petersburg before he established his own newspaper in Milton, North Carolina, a small village in Caswell County just southeast of Danville. That choice suggests that he had a prior association with that neighborhood and so returned there after his Virginia sojourn, a suggestion supported by a large number of people with his surname in that county.

The paper that Perkins came to Petersburg to publish was *The American Star* of Marvel W. Dunnivant. He was a Petersburg native who then conducted a profitable job-printing concern in the town immediately after the War of 1812. In the spring of 1817, Dunnivant set out to publish an energetic new Republican journal to challenge both the *Petersburg Republican* of Edward Pescud (324) and the older Federalist-leaning *Petersburg Intelligencer* of Thomas Whitworth (433) and Francis G. Yancey (463). Initially, he convinced another native son, Thomas W. Lorrain (270), to return home from his situation in Columbia, South Carolina, where he was publishing the *Telescope*. Their new thrice-weekly journal issued its first number in June 1817. However, Lorrain stayed with Dunnivant for just four months before leaving Petersburg once again, this time seeking fresh opportunities in New Orleans, where his older brother Edwin was that port's naval officer.

Dunnivant conducted a hurried search for an experienced replacement, settling on Perkins. He is an obscure figure, someone who may have been trained in Boston (possible but not very likely), and who seems to have been working in Baltimore in early 1816; it may be that Perkins was already in Dunnivant's employ given the short duration of the search and his journeyman status. But he also proved to be a transient partner for Dunnivant, staying for just the first three months of 1818 (January to March) before he left Petersburg for greener pastures as Lorrain had. These disruptions limited patronage for the journal; so rather than risk another short-term partner, Dunnivant closed the *Star* about April 18, 1818.

That June, Perkins started publishing his new *Milton Intelligencer*, just two months after parting from Dunnivant. The weekly survived for about three years with only a few hands involved; the 1820 census shows Perkins employing just a journeyman and two apprentices, the youngest of whom – Angus McNeil, a fourteen-year-old orphan – had just been bound out to him for a five-year term by the county court. In late 1819, Perkins was appointed the town's postmaster, both aiding the distribution of his paper and his collection of content for it. But the locale was problematic, being just fifteen miles distant from the larger town of Danville, Virginia; merchants there were maneuvering to control the area's commerce – in part, by supporting successive weeklies published by Elhanan Reinhart (351) and James Lanier (261) there; those efforts included Caswell County, so marginalizing Milton. Lacking financial support, Perkins closed the *Intelligencer* in either late 1821 or early 1822.

After his paper ended, Perkins is not seen again in the bibliographic record anywhere in the country. But he may have been considering new options in the west in 1823; he died while

on a journey along the new military road built by Andrew Jackson between Nashville and New Orleans, breathing his last that fall in the small town of Tuscumbia on the southern bank of the Tennessee River in far northern Alabama. His family was still Milton then, and it took them another year court to finish probating his estate in the Caswell County.

**NB:** Several older sources suggest that this John H. Perkins became a physician in Milton; the surviving records found researching this narrative indicate that there was another John H. Perkins in Milton who was a doctor, but he died shortly before this printer married in 1821.

### ***Personal Data***

Born:	ca.	1798	North Carolina?
Married	July 26	1821	Susan Royall @ Halifax County, Virginia.
Died:	Sept. 29	1823	Tuscumbia, Alabama.

No record of children found.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Federal Decennial Census, 1820; marriage notice, *Richmond Enquirer*, Aug. 31, 1821; death notice, *Charleston [SC] Courier*, Oct. 29, 1823; Kendall, *Caswell County Court Records*.