

324 PESCUD, EDWARD – [COL. EDWARD PESCUD]

Printer & Publisher

Petersburg

Printer and publisher of the *Petersburg Intelligencer* (1804-05) with John Dickson (134); of the *Petersburg Republican* (1805-27); then of the *Old Dominion* (1827-31); uncle of Thomas Pescud Manson (278).

Pescud was a pivotal figure in the civic and political life of Petersburg in the first third of the nineteenth century. He inherited the journalistic mantle established by the Jeffersonians there, making it into the Jacksonian authority in southern Virginia during the 1820s. His paper gave him a voice that Pescud used to advocate for locally funded and operated industries free of outside influence, becoming an influential political leader there as well.

Early Days

Born in York County, Pescud was part of a well-connected old Virginia family. He was the youngest son of Thomas Pescud (1727-81), a mill-owning planter, county-court justice, and vestryman there. His oldest brother, also named Thomas (1771-1820), succeeded to many of their father's roles, adding a long tenure in the House of Delegates to the list; his oldest sister, Elizabeth, married the rector of Charles Parish, Rev. Thomas Camm, son of the Rev. John Camm, president of the College of William & Mary; and his only-half-sister, Mary, was the mother of Thomas Pescud Manson, the Richmond-based Republican printer who was just four years his junior. His mother brought her own deep connections to the marriage as a daughter of the ancient Chisman family there.

Pescud apparently learned his craft in the *Petersburg Intelligencer* office of William Prentis (340), its Williamsburg-trained founder. From his arrival in the port town in 1786, Prentis had operated a press that supported the town's commerce; his weekly paper was largely an advertising vehicle, issued from an office that produced large quantities of job-printing as well. He sold some books there, but published little more than an annual almanac, as his Williamsburg masters had. It was a model that Pescud would successfully emulate.

When Prentis chose to retire from the business in late 1803, he turned to the printers in his office, journeyman Pescud and foreman John Dickson. Both then in their early twenties, the pair forged a partnership to buy the business from Prentis; their master may have financed the sale, as he remained in Petersburg after his retirement, becoming the city's mayor shortly thereafter. In introducing themselves to their readers in January 1804, Dickson & Pescud promised that the *Intelligencer* would be "conducted upon the same principles as when under the management of Mr. Prentis" – a prudently-voiced Federalist organ. While seemingly an acceptable course for Pescud at the outset, as it now made him an owner of a stable journal, in the end the *Intelligencer* offered a political perspective he did not share; a year later, when the competing *Petersburg Republican* was offered for sale by its founder, Thomas Field (162), Pescud withdrew from the *Intelligencer* to acquire it. Thus, the former partners would find themselves in constant competition until Dickson's death in July 1814. And despite the trading of vitriol in their pages, the most personal notice of Dickson's passing was carried by Pescud's *Republican*, who wrote that while he felt keenly obliged to

report the death, he lacked the ability to do his friend's life justice in print, hoping that "some zealous and more adequate pen" would take up the task.

Thomas Field came to Petersburg in late 1799 to become part of the publishing network that was established by James Lyon (274) to produce a series of Republican journals in advance of the 1800 presidential election. Lyon edited these papers for printer-partners in Staunton, Richmond, and Georgetown, as well as Petersburg; Field was Lyon's partner there. He quickly became a key player in the Republican leadership in the neighborhood. He provided sanctuary and employment for the notorious polemicist James Thomson Callender (075) in 1800; indeed, Callender was arrested at his residence, in his absence, for the "libel" he had recently published in Richmond, *The Prospect Before Us*. His relationship with Lyon ended in mid-1800, when the editor removed to Washington. But Field drew on support in the town's hinterlands, rather than from within its borders, as Prentis did with his paper, and so it survived and grew despite the Federalist leanings of Petersburg's most prominent citizens. Thus this port town developed a Republican reputation that Field nurtured until he disposed of his newspaper in October 1805, apparently in grief over the accidental death of his wife which initiated Field's general withdrawal from public affairs there.

Republican Patriarch

Pescud quickly stepped into the void created by Field's retirement. Indeed, the *Republican* developed an even greater reputation under his care than it had before, aided initially by a continuing association with Jeffersonian essayist John Daly Burk (063), author of the multi-volume *History of Virginia* that issued from the Dickson & Pescud office from 1804 to 1806. Still, his stewardship of the *Republican* was not without its difficulties. In late 1807, both Petersburg papers were challenged by the destruction of the paper mill on which both were dependent, making the supply of needed paper uncertain for about six months – just as Jefferson's embargo also ravished the town's maritime commerce. But more traumatic was the Great Petersburg Fire of July 1815 which destroyed all of the town's printing offices. Yet Pescud survived both disruptions and emerged more prominent after each.

The fire also marks Pescud's start as a civic leader. He served on the *ad hoc* committee formed to collect and distribute financial aid for those left destitute by the conflagration. He was no doubt considered for that post based on his prominent military service during the War of 1812, when he was commissioned a captain in the 6th Regiment of Virginia Militia. Such service was a role he embraced for much of his life, as seen in his commissioning as a lieutenant-colonel in the 3rd Regiment of Virginia Militia in 1820, and his later service in the "Petersburg Grays," a home guard unit of the town's older citizens. But in the immediate wake of the fire, his contributions brought him election as the city's mayor in 1818, a post he held for two years. Thereafter, his public activities turned away from elective office to a practical application of his political ideals through charitable and commercial endeavors.

As with many Republican editors in this era, Pescud became an advocate for the Lancastrian (or Monitorial) Plan, a regimented pedagogical system that employed older students as instructors (monitors) for their younger peers under the schoolmaster's supervision; the approach provided a practical way for large numbers of students to receive instruction at

minimal cost; its inclusive nature also gave it a decidedly democratic cast. Hence, the system became quite popular in America after the War of 1812. In 1821, Pescud was a member of the first board of trustees overseeing the Anderson Seminary, a Lancastrian school funded by the estate of one David Anderson; he then frequently reported on its activities in the pages of his *Republican*.

Motivated by a similar mix of charity and supervision, Pescud was a founding director of the Petersburg Benevolent Mechanic Association in 1825, an organization calculated to aid the "worthy" destitute widows and orphans of the city's fast-growing working class. But at the same time, he compounded the problem by serving as a founding director of the city's first modern cotton mill, the Petersburg Manufacturing Company in 1826, a venture that seems to have brought him far more wealth than did his journalistic enterprise.

In 1823, the movement to colonize west Africa with freed slaves came to the town in the form of the Petersburg Auxiliary of Colonization Society, of which Pescud was a founding member. But his participation in the society was a double-edged sword. A year later, he placed notices in northern mercantile journals seeking the arrest and return of a runaway adolescent slave, "alias Malacchi Banks," last seen on a ship departing Petersburg after having "expressed a wish to his companions to go out with some of the colonists." The advertisement evinces the conflict Pescud now faced in his printing establishment, with its dependence on hired journeymen and enslaved pressmen.

Still, the *Republican* thrived in the 1820s, even as its name became ever more archaic, a result of Pescud's patrons gradually pushing him in directions that he was loath to follow. With James Monroe choosing to follow the two-term precedent set by Washington, the presidential election of 1824 was contested by four candidates who all claimed leadership of the "unitary" Democratic-Republican party; Virginia's leading Republican papers initially backed William H. Crawford, Monroe's Treasury secretary, but Crawford's stroke in 1823 pressed them to decide on either Andrew Jackson or Henry Clay in his place. The cross-town *Intelligencer* backed Clay, setting that journal down the path to its long-lived Whig identity, while Pescud favored Jackson, seeing the Tennessean as the most suitable successor to the mantle of Jefferson and Madison. But a significant number of his patrons thought that John Quincy Adams was a more seemly candidate than the head-strong Jackson, and so forced Pescud to support the divisive resolution of that election in the House of Representatives in the *Republican* – the "corrupt bargain" in which Clay facilitated Adams's win by released his electoral votes to the Massachusetts candidate, purportedly in exchange for the office of Secretary of State.

Jacksonian Stalwart

This situation presented Pescud with a dilemma: whether to adapt his paper to the thinking of those influential patrons, or to embrace the populist views of the majority of Petersburg-area residents. In the early days of the Adams presidency, his dependence on those patrons meant the *Republican* did not openly dispute the actions and policies of the administration, helping create the mythology of an "Era of Good Feelings." But as the 1828 election neared, Pescud found himself in the unhappy position of agreeing with the *Intelligencer* which, as a

result of its support for Clay, was backing the president's reelection. That position seemed untenable to Pescud because though the town was "*the birth spot of Mr. Clay*, there is no place in which his late political association can be more emphatically censured" as in Petersburg, as one Northern observer noted. So he moved to sever ties with those patrons who caused the paper's growing deviation from its original populist (i.e. democratic) objectives.

On October 16, 1827, announced a suspension of the publication of the *Republican*, saying:

"Circumstances beyond my control have compelled me to suspend for a while, but I trust for a short period only, the publication of the *Petersburg Republican*. I regret this step exceedingly, especially at this moment, when the efforts of every man ought to be enlisted by the truly great and interesting election on which the American people will shortly be called upon to act: And I cannot, in this, the last address, which, for a time, I shall be able to make to my fellow citizens, omit to remind them of the necessity of guarding against the many venal efforts that are made to mislead them in regard to that important question."

That notice concluded with the telling comment that "influential friends of Mr. Adams" had offered him "pecuniary aid" to continue the *Republican*, so evincing their attempts to limit the effort to elect Jackson on the Southside.

Nine days later, on October 27, 1827, Pescud made clear the depth of his frustrations with those "friends of Mr. Adams" in introducing his restyled paper, *The Old Dominion*.

"[O]ur opposition to the present administration, has no connection to the individual who is at its head, or to the persons whom he has called to his aid. We object to the political character of Mr. Adams, or rather to his total want of political character. ... We object to all the leading measures of his unfortunate administration—his quixotic "demonstration" at Panama—his destruction of colonial trade—his extraordinary appointments—his great fondness for negotiation. We object, and will for ever raise our voice, against the manner of his coming into office. He may have ascended the Presidential chair honestly—there may have been no bribery and corruption—no intrigue—no management—no bargain and sale—no whisperings and understandings—no interchange of nods and shrugs of the shoulder. All this may be true; but in the honesty of our heart ... we do conscientiously believe, that John Quincy Adams was elected President of these United States by foul and corrupt means, and that the honor of our beloved country, the character of her political institutions, the supremacy of the people's will, require, that those who corruptly obtained office, should feel the chastening rod of the people whom they have abused and contemned, and be made to disgorge their ill-gotten power..."

Many Whig papers – such as the *Alexandria Gazette* of Samuel Snowden (393) – promptly claimed that Pescud's previous report that financial insufficiency had forced the suspension of the *Republican* were simply disingenuous, as the appearance of this vitriolic successor proved. But the partisan realignment that arose during the Adams years is readily evinced in this event, as the journal's supporters in 1824 became its foes in 1827. Still, Pescud was now held in a contempt equal to that which those Whig journals showed for Thomas Ritchie and his *Richmond Enquirer* or Duff Green of the Jacksonian *United States Telegraph*. Yet Pescud

clearly reflected the views of a substantial part of the state's body politic; in 1829, he was nominated to replace Ritchie as printer to the Commonwealth; although losing to the long-serving incumbent (114-56), Pescud easily outdistanced John Hampden Pleasants (330), the Whig candidate (30).

As the reorganization of Pescud's journal conformed to the political reordering of that era, the *Old Dominion* soon superseded the *Intelligencer* as the leading paper in Petersburg, so undermining the fiscal foundation of that long-lived broadsheet – a condition that reached crisis proportions upon the death of its proprietor, Francis G. Yancey (463) in July 1833. It appears that Pescud understood the precarious nature of his competitor's existence soon after that paper reverted to Yancey's hands in late 1829. In August 1830, he announced a planned expansion of the *Old Dominion* in both size and frequency. The rivals had issued twice weekly on alternating days since 1800, and now Pescud proposed a publishing on a thrice-weekly pace, which the financially-constrained Yancey could not soon match.

"So soon as a sufficient number of additional substantial subscribers shall be obtained, to justify the undertaking. The *Old Dominion*, it is, perhaps, useless to say, will continue to advocate and defend sound Republican doctrines, and will support the existing pure and patriotic administration, in all measures having for their object to the maintenance of the great principles of '76 and '98-'99. While the *Old Dominion* will be thus Republican in character, its Editor will not engage in a blind partisan warfare, and, losing sight of principles, support any man, or set of men, however exalted to their talents or prominent their situation in life. Although the *Old Dominion* will continue to be, as formerly, uniform and deviating in his Republican course, yet it will not be exclusively political. The additional room which it will possess, when it shall be enlarged, will enable the Editor to render his columns more acceptable to the public, in many respects. When the proposed enlargement shall take place, the Editor would wish to consult every taste and feeling, which shall not militate against his political principles. He will not make any laborious protestations, but thinks he can promise to render the *Old Dominion*, should success attend his present undertaking, a vehicle of varied and valuable information, equal in general interest to any other paper in Virginia."

Whether Pescud succeeded in this plan, or not, is uncertain, as no issues are known to have survived from the following months. The numerous references to the journal seen in other Jacksonian broadsheets in late 1830 imply that he succeeded, though an absence of hyper-critical comments on Pescud regularly seen in Whig papers previously suggests otherwise.

Retirement

Regardless of Pescud's ability to expand his paper, its life was shortened by Jackson himself. In December 1830, John H. Patterson, surveyor of customs for the Petersburg region (City Point and Bermuda Hundred), died. Within three weeks, Jackson had appointed Pescud to succeed him. He was now faced with the prospect of moving to City Point, some ten miles east of Petersburg at the confluence of the Appomattox and James Rivers, to execute his commission. Thus Pescud chose to close *The Old Dominion* rather than try to sell it hastily,

so ending his twenty-five-year-long career in Republican journalism. Snowden reported his appointment with the derisive comment that the era was "fine times for Jackson editors," a parting shot to his long-time foe. A year later, Marvel W. Dunnavant (154), who had once published a competitor to Pescud's *Republican*, returned to Petersburg to produce a new Jacksonian paper in its place, acquiring Pescud's press and types to complete the task; but he could not find the support there that had sustained Pescud for so long.

The aging Jeffersonian remained at his post at City Point for the rest of his life. He bought a large plantation house there in 1832 and converted it into the City Point Steamboat Hotel, conducting his appointment from there. It became home for his still young family; he had married a second time in 1820, following the death of his barren first wife. Susan Brooke Francisco was the twenty-four-year-old daughter of Revolutionary-era hero Peter Francisco, called "Virginia's Hercules" for his feats of strength and stamina during the war. The couple had five children, naming their three sons after notable figures in both the state's and their families' histories. Pescud died among them in July 1840, not quite sixty-two. He was buried in Spotswood Square in Petersburg with considerable ceremony; but the devastation visited on the city center during the Civil War siege required his reburial in the historic Blandford Cemetery upon his wife's death in 1869.

Personal Data

Born: Dec. 8 1778 York County, Virginia.

Married [1]: April 16 1807 Elizabeth Pearce @ Petersburg (d. 1819).

Married [2]: Jan. 19 1820 Susan Brooke Francisco @ Buckingham Cty., Va.

Died: July 15 1840 City Point, Prince George County, Virginia.

Children: Peter Francisco (b. 1821); Norborne Spotswood (b. ca. 1822); Robert Brooke (b. ca. 1824); Catherine Fautleroy (b. 1826); Marceline Armita (b. 1829).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Cappon; Seagrave, *Artisans & Mechanics*; Wyatt, *Petersburg*; notices in *Alexandria Gazette* (1820-31), *New York National Advocate* (1824), *National Intelligencer* (1820-31), and *Richmond Enquirer* (1828-40); genealogical data from articles on Pescud, Manson, Chisman, and Francisco families in *William & Mary Quarterly* (1905-06).