

339 POTTER, WALTER

Bookbinder, Bookseller, Stationer

Richmond

Bookbinder, bookseller, and stationer in Richmond (1802-17), largely as the partner of W. H. Fitzwhylsonn (165).

Potter was a familiar figure in Richmond in the first decades of the nineteenth century as a partner in the prominent bindery and bookselling firm of Fitzwhylsonn & Potter. His origins are uncertain, but given known connections of the Ayscough family of Henrico County, into which he married in 1810, and a Potter family then centered there, the binder was likely born in central Virginia at the end of the Revolution. (A sister of his future father-in-law married in Henrico County in 1786 with one Thomas Potter providing surety.)

The start of his independent bindery came shortly after the death of Archibald Currie (113), suggesting he was a part of Currie's shop, possibly being trained there by the old Williamsburg hand, and that he had left the shop when John Pumfrey (344), Currie's partner, closed their short-lived business in 1801 and turned to W. H. Fitzwhylsonn for a job. At that same moment, Potter struck out on his own, opening a bindery and stationery store on Main Street opposite the mercantile firm of Mitchel & Gardner.

In September 1805, after about three years in business on his own, Potter replaced Pumfrey as Fitzwhylsonn's partner. Since Currie's death in April 1801, Pumfrey had struggled to settle his partner's diverse estate, failing in the effort; the unhappy episode ended with Pumfrey fleeing Richmond and his debts in mid-1805, and with Fitzwhylsonn adding Potter to his long-standing concern. The resulting Fitzwhylsonn & Potter bookstore, situated on the corner of Main and Fourteenth Streets, became a landmark in advertisements published in Richmond's papers. Together, the pair became one of the larger blank book manufacturers in the capital, as well as an important part of the subscription publishing networks based in New York and Philadelphia that issued scientific and literary magazines, as well as reprints of European encyclopedias. Moreover, Potter's considerable trade experience allowed Fitzwhylsonn to embrace several new, non-business roles in the city that regularly took him away from their store.

In the summer of 1817, however, the two came to a parting of the ways after a dozen successful years together. The circumstances of the dissolution of the firm of Fitzwhylsonn & Potter were unstated, but Fitzwhylsonn reported that he bought Potter's interest in its entirety, so leaving Potter to start again. It is clear that Potter intended to do just that, as the notices that he placed in Richmond's daily *Commercial Compiler* indicate, but ill-health quickly intervened. Three months later Potter was dead. His passing was reported solely in the *Compiler*, and then just as a simple one-line notice, suggesting that his reputation in the Virginia capital had suffered in the closing years of his life.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1780 Virginia [?]
Married [1]: Mar. 10 1810 Agnes Ayscough @ Richmond, Virginia (d. 1811).
Married [2]: Nov. 12 1812 Sarah Jordan @ Henrico County, Virginia.
Died: Nov. 23 1817 Richmond, Virginia.
Children: No record of off-spring found; probably died childless.

Sources: Imprints; MESDA Index nos. 11685, 29165; Marriage Bond Records for Richmond and Henrico County; advertising notices in Richmond newspapers (1803-17).