

### 353 RHOADES, CHARLES B.

**Printer, Publisher**

**Staunton**

Printer of *The Spirit of the Press* (1811-12) at Staunton for James Williamson (448); then publisher of *The People's Friend* (1812-13) there.

Rhoades was a trained printer who was brought to Staunton to print a Republican paper there, which led to his proprietorship of that paper's successor. Yet both were unprofitable ventures that compelled Rhoades to leave Staunton in financial ruin.

Where Rhoades came from or was trained is unknown, but historical context suggests two possibilities; first, he may have come from Washington County, Pennsylvania, the origin of many Shenandoah Valley printers during this era, as the Rhoades surname – with such a particular spelling – was then well-known there; or, he may have come from Boston, where one Ebenezer Rhoades (1775-1818) published the influential Jeffersonian newspaper, the *Independent Chronicle*; but neither premise can be proven without more evidence.

Staunton was the seat of "Old Federal Augusta," so making the publication of a Republican journal there problematic. Jacob D. Dietrich (135) had successfully published his *Staunton Eagle* for four years between 1807 and 1811, but moved on to Lancaster, Ohio, in the spring of 1811 to acquire and reinvigorate the dying *Ohio Eagle* there at the behest of transplanted Augustans. On his departure, James Williamson, a local merchant and land-speculator, acquired Dietrich's subscriber list and his license to publish the laws of the then-sitting session of Congress in his paper. As Dietrich took his press to Ohio with him, Williamson bought the press formerly used by William G. Lyford (272) to publish his Federalist paper, the *Republican Farmer*; Lyford had left that press in the hands of his brother-in-law, George Mitchell, to secure his unpaid debts when he sold that paper to Isaac Collett (100) in mid-1810 and left town; Mitchell, in turn, sold that press to Williamson in February 1811.

Williamson now procured trained help to produce an entirely new journal – *The Spirit of the Press* – to replace Dietrich's deceased one. That tradesman was Charles B. Rhoades. On April 29, 1811, he signed a contract with Williamson,

"...for the term of twelve months as a printer, in conducting a news-paper ... called "The Spirit of the Press"—for this service [Williamson provided] ... boarding, washing and lodging during the continuance of the contract, and to pay him wages at the rate of four dollars and fifty cents per week payable at the end of each month."

The new weekly they published bore a masthead motto proclaiming that "The Democratic cause we will maintain, unawed by Fear, and unburied by Gain." And in his introductory address, Williamson eschewed the usual grandiose pledges of such declarations, claiming that he had

"...nothing to boast of but an honest desire to promote the true interests of his country. This he believes will be best done by the detection and exposure of falsehood, and the dissemination of truth and correct principles. He has nothing to promise but a faithful endeavor to discharge this important duty."

Despite this optimistic and confident start, it appears that Rhoades failed to abide by the terms of his contract with Williamson over the ensuing weeks, leading one Federalist paper in Philadelphia to describe the *Spirit of the Press* as "a dirty little 'democratic' paper dish-cloth, eked forth sometimes weekly, sometimes once in a fortnight ..." So to sweeten his deal with Rhoades, Williamson offered an additional dollar per week if the printer would adhere strictly to the contract until it expired in April 1812.

Rhoades, however, walked away from Williamson's employ in November 1811, immediately filing suit against his employer in the Staunton's Hustings Court, claiming that he was due that additional dollar during the course of the year, rather than at the end of the contract as Williamson asserted, and so had been defrauded by him in the amount of "fifty-four dollars and ninety-two cents." Rhoades carried the day at trial and Williamson was obliged to sign a promissory note for the disputed sum, even as he promptly appealed the judgment to the Superior Court of Appeals.

The effect on the *Spirit of the Press* was that it ceased publication at about the time that Rhoades left its office – November 15, 1811. But it was not the end of the printer's work in Staunton. Once the court had ruled in his favor, Rhoades secured the use of that now idle press – evidently through the offices of Williamson's security, John McDowell and Morgan Morris – and began publishing a new Republican paper called *The People's Friend* starting in September 1812. Only three numbers of that succeeding journal are known now, leaving the content of the succeeding journal unknown, though it was clearly a Republican one given its provocative title, taken from *L'Ami du Peuple*, the Parisian paper of revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat.

This new weekly, however, followed the *Spirit* into oblivion in late 1813, most likely because of Rhoades's death. Such an outcome is inferred from Williamson's continuing litigation. In May 1813, Rhoades sold the unpaid note that Williamson had tendered in conformance to the 1812 judgement against him at a marked discount (\$10); the buyer, one Seth Norton, then attempted to use the note to purchase a carriage body from Williamson, leading to a new suit over whether either man had defrauded the other in that transaction; while Rhoades was the financier at the root of this new dispute, he does not appear in the case record when trial was held on this matter in February 1814, suggesting that he died sometime between October 2, 1813, when the last known number of his paper issued, and the trial date. (Williamson lost this case as well and was assessed substantial costs.) Yet no definitive record of Rhoades fate has yet been found.

***No Personal Data yet discovered.***

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; *Annals of Augusta County*; Chalkley, *Chronicles*.