

354 RICE, JOHN H. – [REV. JOHN HOLT RICE]

Publisher

Richmond

Publisher of a series of religious periodicals (1815-27) via the Richmond presses of Arthur G. Booker (041), John Warrock (430), William Waller Gray (193), and Nathan Pollard (335).

Rice was a Presbyterian evangelical who embraced periodical publishing as an essential tool of his missionary work, an approach inculcated by his mentors George Addison Baxter and Archibald Alexander in the first decade of the 1800s.

Born in Bedford County in 1777, Rice studied as a teenager under George Addison Baxter at Liberty Hall Academy (today Washington & Lee University), then essentially a Presbyterian preparatory school. After graduation, Rice taught private schools in the area by Virginia's new Presbyterian college, Hampden-Sidney College, in Prince Edward County. By 1799, Rice was acting as a tutor at the seminary there, so came under the sway of Archibald Alexander, then the school's president; the two men developed a mentorship relationship that lasted for the rest of Rice's short life. With his ordination in 1803, Alexander and Baxter brought Rice into a magazine project authorized by the Lexington Synod, the bi-monthly *Virginia Religious Magazine*, issued from the Lexington press of Samuel Walkup (426) from 1804 to 1807.

After its demise, Rice continued writing and preaching in support of Presbyterian missions. The work took him to Richmond in 1812. In the state capital, he built the town's first independent Presbyterian church-building, while promoting further growth of the faith by establishing a Young Men's Missionary Society. The Society put Rice in close contact with several print tradesmen, including printer Nathan Pollard, publisher Philip DuVal (155), bookbinder William Lownes (271), and bookseller John Boyce (047), who was the society's treasurer. Those associations led to Rice's return to missionary publishing in 1815. While issued under varying names and with changeable frequency, the periodical he produced in Richmond that year was an evolving production that would survive his eventual departure. So over the next twenty-five years, the Synod of Virginia supported this denominational voice as it shifted from a weekly, to a biweekly, to a monthly, to a monthly with a weekly attached, and then to a weekly alone again – all to suit a growing number of patrons.

The initial weekly phase of publication ran from July 1815 to June 1816 under the title of *The Christian Monitor*. Its abrupt suspension apparently had little to do with Rice's efforts; rather it coincided with the end of the two-year-long reorganization of Richmond's printing offices triggered by the death of Samuel Pleasants (331) in October 1814. By January 1815, John McDonald Burke (065) had bought out the old *Virginia Argus* office from its founder's estate, breaking it into three separate businesses. He and his brother David (064) retained the paper, while spinning off the bookstore to Pleasants' shop-foreman Philip DuVal, and the press-office to journeyman Arthur G. Booker. But now the Burkes had to pay Booker to print the *Argus* for them, just as Rice paid him to print the *Monitor*. With this transition, Booker and DuVal withdrew from Rice's project, evidently to keep any revenue that their firms generated away from the Burkes, who still wanted to take a cut from their new concerns. As a result, the Burke brothers' business failed that October, financially destroying them. Through all of this, Rice managed to stay out of the way. When his *Monitor* restarted

in September 1816, the publisher was a Richmond bookseller unaffiliated with the ugly *Argus* conflict, one John Warrock, who printed the journal elsewhere in town. More importantly, though, Rice had learned from the journal's first year; he used the break to reduce his editorial load by changing his *Monitor* to a biweekly, allowing him to continue his other missionary activities while the paper continued to grow. Yet the pressures on Rice were not relieved sufficiently by this adjustment, so he suspended the *Monitor* once again in August 1817 pending its own "reorganization." His objective here seems to have been to secure tighter control over its production, as well as to further simplify the editorial process.

The result from this second hiatus was a monthly magazine that continued uninterrupted for the ensuing eleven years: the *Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine*. The new version appeared in January 1818, produced by a job-printer without any obligation to the Richmond newspaper trade, as would continue to be the practice throughout the journal's life. Over its first two years, that job-printer was William Waller Gray, a journeyman printer who bounced between the press offices of Richmond and Lynchburg throughout the 1810s; when Rice came calling, Gray had just concluded another short-lived journalistic effort, *The Spirit of the Union*, with Thomas Burling (066); he would never produce another. In 1820, Gray apparently sold his office to Nathan Pollard, a minister-publisher who rebuilt the shop around religious publications, produced with hired help, issued from his "Franklin Press" office. Pollard published the next eight volumes of the *Evangelical Magazine*., as well as the second number in *The Pamphleteer*, a series of religious essays that Rice wrote. Gray had published the first in late 1819. Rice's new monthly continued to grow under his editorial guidance, largely a result of his ability to fulfill the expectations of his readers, as seen in the magazine's ever-changing title. Styled initially as the *Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine*, Rice dropped the geographic appellation in 1821 and reinforced its original message as the *Evangelical and Literary Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, thus seeking a broader audience in the Upper South.

With the close of the magazine's fourth volume, though, Rice returned to his original intent, a weekly missionary newspaper. In January 1822, he handed over the reins of the magazine to friend Rev. John Blair Hoge and engaged Pollard to help issue the weekly *Family Visitor* that April. This new arrangement continued until Rice resigned at the end of 1826 to devote his energies to his teaching responsibilities at the new Union Theological Seminary, at last an entity independent from Hampden-Sidney College. Then the *Visitor* fell to the editorship of Nathan Pollard alone, while the monthly, now the *Literary and Evangelical Magazine*, remained in Hoge's hands; both continued with the fiscal support of the Synod of Virginia and the literary support of the region's Presbyterian clergy, including that of Rice.

Eventually, the magazine was supplanted by the weekly once the *Visitor* absorbed the *North Carolina Telegraph* of Fayetteville to create the *Visitor and Telegraph*. Amasa Converse, now in charge of both, closed Rice's respected monthly in 1828 in order to focus on the larger-circulating weekly. After another refit as the *Southern Religious Telegraph* in January 1830, the paper achieved the broadest reach and greatest distribution of all Virginia Presbyterian periodicals published before the Civil War.

Rice continued to have an influence in the two periodicals, but withdrew from editorial pursuits in favor of his teaching ones, As he had forged a considerable national reputation through his religious publishing and his extensive travels throughout the country. Rice was offered the presidency of the College of New Jersey (today's Princeton University) as the successor to Ashbel Green in September 1822; however, he turned down the position at the then-declining Presbyterian academy in order to stay at his treasured Union Theological Seminary. That November, the Hanover Presbytery made Rice the school's first professor of theology and its first designated chief administrator – so later called its first president. Rice was still serving in the role when he died unexpectedly in September 1831. His memorialists noted that beside the well-known periodicals he directed, Rice had also published a dozen other titles, mostly sermons; it is likely that there were others issued from his prolific pen.

Personal Data

Born: Nov. 28 1777 Bedford County, Virginia.

Married: July 9 1802 Anne Smith @ Prince Edward County, Virginia.

Died: Sept. 3 1831 Prince Edward County, Virginia.

Died without offspring.

Sources: Imprints; Hubbard on Richmond; Sprague, *Annals (Presbyterian)*; Christian, *Richmond*. Maxwell, *Memoir of John Holt Rice (1825)*.