

355 RICHARDS, GEORGE

Printer, Publisher

Alexandria

Publisher of the *Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser* (1784-89), with the support of Thomas Bond (039) and likely that of Samuel Hanson (200), his successors.

Richards was the publisher of the first journal issued in Virginia after the Revolutionary War outside of Richmond; before that, he had been the first to establish a job-printing office in Alexandria. Both of those ventures were supported by William Goddard (1740-1817), the Baltimore printer and publisher, who it seems employed Richards there during the war.

The Alexandria businesses that Richards established were dependent on outside financing, as can be seen in the common name of George Richards & Company. Initially, that backing came from Goddard, who was then (1781-84) attempting to build a publishing business that was more than his decade-old *Maryland Journal*; the new Alexandria office was essentially a branch job-press that freed up his similar Baltimore press for a book-printing concern with Eleazer Oswald, while his sister Mary Katherine Goddard attended to his *Journal*; Richards was thus both an employee and a partner in the enterprise. Richards set up the Alexandria job-press in mid-to-late 1782; for the ensuing three years, whenever either office required printers or bookbinders, the notices soliciting such labor placed in the *Maryland Journal* told all those interested in the jobs to apply at either office.

Richards took up journalism about eighteen months later; his weekly, the *Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser*, issued its first number on February 5, 1784. It was not just the first paper published in Alexandria; it was also the first in Virginia to NOT assume the title of "Gazette," a clear recognition of its non-official status. His *Journal* was, like Goddard's, first and foremost a mercantile advertiser, a vehicle intended to aid and advance the port town's commerce. The immediate success of the *Journal* points to the need for such a vehicle in northern Virginia, so also proving the wisdom of the venture. How long Goddard was a part of the paper is unclear, as he resumed direct control of his *Maryland Journal* in January 1784; sometime in the following two years, Richards acquired a new partner in one Thomas Bond, a Pennsylvanian who had come to Alexandria to conduct a land-office, speculating in lands in the area of Morgantown gained through the military bounty warrants that he earned during the war. Newspaper advertising was a key in his business, and joining with Richards gave him ready access at less-than-going rates. The two were still allied in July 1789 when the printer died unexpectedly.

"Hasty was the summons which called him from this terrestrial Scene, --- as the Day previous to his Dissolution, he was walking the Streets, little suspecting the King of Terrors to be so near at Hand!"

Bond promptly joined with Samuel Hanson, a war-time friend in Philadelphia, to continue operating the *Journal*; Hanson was the scion of a major Maryland family, who had moved to Alexandria in 1786 to conduct a dry-goods and forwarding business there with his brother Thomas. As with Bond's business, his was dependent on newspaper advertising, and he may have already had an interest in the *Journal* – one of the anonymous backers, like Bond, of

George Richards & Company. After a three-week-long suspension, the new firm of Hanson & Bond issued their restyled *Virginia Gazette and Alexandria Advertiser*, a title reflecting both proprietors' association their new neighbor, now-president, George Washington. With neither partner being a trained printer, the brevity of the hiatus indicates that the break continued only as long as it took for them to find and employ a new craftsman, clearly indicating that they had been Richards's partners – there were no legal encumbrances to their use of their office.

Goddard would later complain to Isaiah Thomas, the Worcester, Massachusetts, publisher, in correspondence informing Thomas' *History of Printing in America* (1810), that he had never been compensated for the press and type he had "loaned" Richards to conduct his *Journal*. But that was not unusual for him; in late 1788, he had also helped establish another ill-fated printer, Charles Fierer (163) in a press office in Georgetown, Maryland, advertising the new venture in his *Maryland Journal*; he even sent help to a struggling Fierer in 1789, his cousin Thomas Updike Fosdick (167), before the venture finally collapsed in Dumfries in 1791, following a forced relocation there in 1790. Thus Goddard's support of Richards, like that of Fierer, was part of a larger pattern; it was not bestowed grudgingly or conditionally, despite the grumbling; rather, Goddard was a willing sponsor of new talent in the trade. Unfortunately, Richards did not live long enough to fully benefit from Goddard's largess.

Personal Data

Died: July 4 1789 Alexandria, Virginia.

No record of wife or children yet discovered.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; *Artisans & Merchants*; Thomas, *History of Printing*; Goddard letters in Thomas Papers, A.A.S.; notices in Goddard's *Maryland Journal* (1782-89), death notice there July 7, 1789.