

359 RIND, WILLIAM A. – [WILLIAM ALEXANDER RIND]

Printer, Publisher

Richmond

Publisher of *Virginia Federalist* (1799-1800) at Richmond in partnership with John Stewart (401); son of William (358) and Clementina (356) Rind, brother of James Rind (357), and brother-in-law of James Bagnall (467); trained by Thomas Nicolson (315); later partnered with Charles Prentiss (341) in Washington.

Rind was a controversial figure in Virginia, a native son who left the United States to pursue his trade in British Canada, returned home to conduct a Federalist press in Richmond, and whose activities as proprietor of that press drove him from the state permanently.

Foundations

Born in Williamsburg in 1766, Rind was the eldest child of William and Clementina Rind, the conductors of the first avowedly-political press established in Virginia. His middle name set him apart from his like-named father, given in honor of his recently-deceased grandfather, Alexander Rind (1700-58), the Scottish immigrant founder of the family's American branch. The untimely deaths of his parents – William in 1773 and Clementina in 1774 – left Rind orphaned at barely eight years of age; he and his siblings were also left destitute, the result of the insolvency of their parents' printing business. The local Masonic Lodge, in which their father had been a member, provided the eldest boys (William and John) with an education; so it is unsurprising that Rind eventually ended up as an apprentice in the printing office of John Dixon Sr. (140) and Thomas Nicolson, both leading figures in that lodge. Nicolson was the trained printer in that association, and so became Rind's trade instructor.

When the state government removed to Richmond in 1780, the Dixon & Nicolson office went there as well; Nicolson became the principal proprietor, aided by journeyman William Prentis (340) and the young apprentice Rind, while Dixon remained in Williamsburg. At the end of 1781, after hostilities with the British army ceased, the firm of Dixon & Nicolson was dissolved and replaced by that of Nicolson & Prentis, which kept Rind in their employ; that firm was, in turn, dissolved in June 1785, with Prentis relocating to Petersburg to establish an independent press and Nicolson doing likewise in Richmond; Rind was still with Nicolson & Prentis when that end came, but it is still unclear whether he joined Prentis in Petersburg or stayed in Richmond with Nicolson after the parting.

What is clear, however, is that by 1788 Rind had left Virginia, travelling to Charlottetown on the Island of St. John (today called Prince Edward Island) in maritime Canada; there he became foreman in the small press office of James Robertson, Sr. (1747-1816). Robertson was a Loyalist publisher during the Revolutionary era, a Scottish immigrant who conducted papers in Albany (1771-73), Norwich, Connecticut (1773-76), New York City (1776-78 and 1782-83), Philadelphia (1778), and Charleston (1779-82); when the British evacuated New York City, he removed to Shelburne, Nova Scotia (1783-87), and later on to St. John (1787-90) to become "the King's printer" for then Governor Edmund Fanning; shortly after setting up shop there, Robertson convinced Rind to join him. It proved a momentous decision for Rind; Robertson left his office in Rind's care in the spring of 1789 to make a "business trip"

to England and never returned; Rind was named "the King's printer" in his own right the following year – an ironic twist for the son of parents who had each been named "printer to the colony and dominion of Virginia" by its revolutionary leaders. In August 1790, he also married there, taking as his wife Elizabeth Bagnall, daughter of a Loyalist from Philadelphia who had settled in Charlottetown shortly before Rind's arrival; their union would last fifty-one years.

Yet after eight successful years in that small village, Rind yearned for greater opportunities in larger places as the way to support a family with four young children; so in the summer of 1798, he moved his family to Richmond. He took with him his brother-in-law, James Bagnall, then a fifteen-year-old apprentice and later a journeyman in his American press offices; Bagnall would eventually return to Charlottetown in 1804 to take up Rind's former role as "the King's printer" in that British colonial outpost.

Federalist Publisher

Once Rind returned to Virginia, he was recruited by John Stewart, the soon-to-be-former Clerk of the House of Delegates, to produce a new Federalist journal in Richmond that he would edit; backed by a handful of influential merchant-planters, their paper was designed as an energetic alternative to the staid and aging *Virginia Gazette* of Augustine Davis (119), one capable of opposing the Republican *Examiner* published by the new public printer, Meriwether Jones (242), as Davis was then not. In May 1799, Rind and Stewart commenced publication of the *Virginia Federalist*, and immediately engaged in editorial combat with the *Examiner* and the other newly-founded Republican journals started in Virginia in 1799 and 1800 under the tutelage of James Lyon (274), son of the notorious Vermont congressman Matthew Lyon. But Rind and Stewart soon found that their efforts were thwarted by the larger number of opposing writers gathered by Jefferson's stalwarts in the state, even as Rind brought in his brother James, now a rising young attorney in the capital, as an added editorial hand. The *Virginia Federalist* became a particular target for the highly-acidic pen of James Thomson Callender (075), the Republican polemicist then in exile in Virginia, whose essays drew heated responses from Stewart, the Rinds, and their supporters. Moreover, both Rind's and Stewart's recent pasts came into play in public perceptions of their paper and its backers; while Stewart had provoked enmity by using his position in the Assembly to oppose Republican efforts therein to counter the Alien & Sedition Acts – exemplified in Madison's Virginia Resolution – Rind had an even larger problem; his service to the imperial authorities in British Canada seemed to confirm specifically accusations aimed at Federalists generally that they desired a return to monarchical governance in America; it was a charge that would haunt Rind for the remainder of his journalistic career.

Once it became clear that Jefferson would prevail over Adams in the 1800 election, Rind and Stewart recognized the futility of their situation in the home of the incoming president. Facing up to the prospect of a slow death by many small cuts for the *Virginia Federalist*, but also believing in their role as censors of the ascendant Republican majority, the pair chose to relocate the paper rather than closing it, and claim a place on the larger national stage in doing so. In August 1800, they suspended publication of the fifteen-month-old journal and moved their press office to the District of Columbia. On September 25th, just six weeks

later, the *Washington Federalist* issued from their new Georgetown location, with the New Englander Charles Prentiss (341) prominently reported as its editor. Prentiss may have been a part of the project while it was still housed in Richmond, given the late 1799 closure of his foregoing *Political Focus* in Leominster, Massachusetts, although his overt connection was not recorded until after the move. The new editor proved more proficient at the task than had Stewart, which allowed the financially-strapped Virginian to sell his interest to Prentiss the following spring and retire to more profitable pursuits.

Many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century commentators went on at length to say that the change in title of Rind's journal was intended to tie it to the city of Washington, while it issued from Georgetown. But even a brief perusal of the *Federalist's* content shows clearly that Rind, Prentiss, and their backers were now a part of an effort among Federalists, particularly those outside of New England, to distance themselves from the rejected policies of the Adams administration while embracing ideals embodied in George Washington, a reverential appeal originating in the founder's unexpected death in December 1799. This approach gave the paper a better chance to survive in the District than it had in Richmond, as did its accelerated frequency, which became daily whenever Congress was in session.

By early 1802, Rind could think about expanding and reorganizing his business, a course that involved both an addition and a subtraction. On January 29th, Rind acquired *The Museum and Washington and Georgetown Advertiser* published by Charles D. Green & David English and merged it into his *Washington Federalist*. Then in March, Prentiss sold his interest the business back to Rind in order to finance a new Baltimore journal he had started on January 1st: the *Republican or Anti-Democrat*. The two transactions significantly increased the debt encumbering the new firm of William A. Rind & Company, which would prove to be a long-term problem. But in the shorter term, the changes created a fire storm among the newly expanded paper's subscribers. Cancellations ran rampant, with one reader writing that Rind was "too much of a Tory for me and therefore I will not have his paper."

The *American Citizen* in New York, edited by Republican controversialist James Cheetham, carried the critique of Rind further, reporting the common, inaccurate perceptions of him:

"Born and educated in Nova Scotia, that region of contamination and the receptacle of everything vile, his groveling and innervate mind has not been able to rise superior to that polluting spot that imparted to him his youthful ideas."

Prentiss was also lambasted in Cheetham's comment on the changes made in Georgetown, prompting a verbatim republication of the attack in his *Republican*, followed by a point-by-point rebuttal of the numerous errors within the commentary. Rind, in turn, reprinted the whole exchange in his journal, but left his retorts for his disgruntled subscribers alone:

"As to the epithet **tory**, with which we are so liberally branded, we do not think it worth noticing, otherwise, than merely to show what base and illiberal means are used to destroy the credit of this paper."

Clearly, the taint of Loyalism that hung over Rind in Virginia still had not been expunged in the three years of his association with the *Federalist* press.

As a result, the merger did not generate the expected revenues that Rind needed to redeem the promissory notes he had signed to effect the changes of early 1802. In May 1803, he was forced to again dissolve the company that he headed to bring new financing that could allow payment of overdue notes. But shortly thereafter, Rind was sued in the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia by three of his largest creditors for payment of monies that were still due to them: the Washington job-printer Charles Cist, the Baltimore booksellers John & George Hagerty, and the firm of Green & English, the former owners of *The Museum*. Rind lost all three suits in fairly short order, resulting in a public auction in July 1804 of all of his salable property: his three presses, their various printing supplies, and all of his furniture, office, household, and kitchen; he evidently did not own any real estate. Remarkably, the sale of his tools did not destroy Rind's newspaper. He continued to publish the *Washington Federalist* by employing job-presses in the District, slowly rebuilding his press office with the revenues generated by a journal that now issued just thrice-weekly all year round.

In August 1808, Rind decided to leave partisan journalism behind and shift his editorial focus to religious periodicals. First he sold his *Washington Federalist* to a group headed by Jonathan S. Findlay, a schoolmaster and librarian of the Washington Library; then he began soliciting subscriptions for a weekly Methodist paper that would be entitled *The Religious Repository*. That project never came to fruition, however, likely because a lack of paying subscribers in a year of economic turmoil following the end of the Embargo of 1807. Rind would not publish a periodical again, preferring instead to become a job-printer.

Post-Partisan Printing

The extent of Rind's job printing business is uncertain, as is its long term success. There are very few imprints in the bibliographic record than can be attributed to his press after 1808. Yet over the ensuing two decades, Rind is seen in Washington's newspapers conducting the business, usually indirectly in notices published by others, often Congressmen, indicating that his press gave him a viable living. Indeed, in June 1815, he moved his business into larger quarters formerly occupied by Joseph Milligan, the noted Georgetown bookseller and bookbinder. And after 1808, the only debt notice involving Rind was published in August 1820, when he was forced to dissolve the firm of W. A. Rind & Company because of the bankruptcy of his then partner, James C. Dunn.

Shortly before that dissolution, it appears that Rind took on printing a new weekly, though not as a proprietor. His eldest son, William Alexander Rind, Jr., commenced publishing the *Metropolitan* in January 1820, employing his father's press to do so; in turn, Rind brought another relative into the project, his nephew Samuel Seabrook Rind, the son of his brother James (who died in 1803). The cousins continued with the *Metropolitan* until 1827, though often in the background, suggesting that the elder Rind retired from the print trade entirely sometime between 1821 and 1827 and left the work to his younger protégées.

Family appears to have been Rind's principal focus in his later years. In April 1830, he stood as security for the marriage of his nephew Samuel to Rebecca Montgomery, and again in November 1831 for his second marriage to Araminta Maria Kankey after Rebecca's death. In the end, Rind outlived his beloved wife Elizabeth by a year, passing away in the residence of

his like-named son in March 1842. His obituary published in the *National Intelligencer*, once a vigorous competitor to his partisan journal, remembered him kindly: "Few men ever retained more justly the esteem of their fellow-citizens, and none ever died more sincerely lamented." Obviously, the thirty-four years that had elapsed since Rind ended his career as a partisan journalist tempered his reputation among his contemporaries.

Personal Data

Born: in 1766 Williamsburg, Virginia.
Married: Aug. 24 1790 Elizabeth Bagnall @ Charlottetown (PEI), Canada.
Died: Mar. 19 1842 Washington, District of Columbia.
Children: William A. Jr. (b. 1791); Charlotte (b. 1793); Johanna (b. 1795);
 Clementina Elizabeth (b. 1797); two infant deaths (1797 & 1799).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Hubbard on Richmond; Goodwin, *Bruton Parish*; Tremaine, *Bibliography of Canadian Imprints*; *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*; Bryan, *History of National Capital*; notices in Washington & Georgetown newspapers (1800-42).