

368 ROYLE, JOSEPH

Printer & Publisher

Williamsburg

Official printer to the Virginia colony (1761-66); publisher of the original *Virginia Gazette* (1761-66) as successor to William Parks (321) and William Hunter Sr. (230).

Royle was an English-trained journeyman printer who experienced both private success and public censure when he emigrated to Virginia to conduct the Williamsburg printing office of William Hunter Sr., so becoming his legatee and successor.

From his arrival in the colony in July 1759, Royle proved to be a controversial figure because of the context of his relocation. Hunter had spent the preceding three years in England in an effort to regain his health. In Hunter's absence, John Stretch (407), ostensibly just his book-binder, managed his Williamsburg office for him; yet during Stretch's tenure (1756-59), he made the official *Virginia Gazette* into a vehicle for political debate, rather than the voice of the royal governor as it had been since its inception in 1736; as that public debate centered on the reviled policies of Robert Dinwiddie, the resident governor found that the focal shift impaired his ability to administer the colony in the midst of the ongoing war with France. When Dinwiddie was finally recalled home in the winter of 1758-59, both he and his London superiors made it known to Hunter that the printer needed to return to Virginia and regain control of his renegade press. On his return home, Hunter brought two journeyman printers with him – Royle and Alexander Purdie (345) – who promptly replaced Stretch and probably the rest of the office staff. Thus Royle was identified, from the first, with an effort to both rein in the colonists' political leaders and stymie open public discourse. Royle apparently did not understand the full extent or consequences of such an identification until the Stamp Act controversy in 1765, six years later.

Ascension

Hunter resumed his earlier roles as office manager, newspaper proprietor, public printer, and deputy postmaster general for British North America in 1759; and over the ensuing two years Royle was his primary assistant (and sometime surrogate) in those varied roles. A surviving account of Hunter's office in spring 1760 suggests that the foreman Royle well understood the necessity for the press to meet the mandates of the imperial government, and that he had little tolerance for the amusements afforded to visitors in the office by Purdie, his gregarious Scottish journeyman; Royle was all business, while Purdie was affable. Thus it was unsurprising that when Hunter finally died in August 1761, the sizable burden of conducting Virginia's sole printing office fell to the twenty-nine-year-old Royle alone.

The consequent shakeup of the office made Royle into both an independent tradesman and a member of Hunter's family. Over the following three months, Royle managed the press in the same fashion that Hunter had, resulting in his appointment as printer to the colony on November 5, 1761 at the start of the next Assembly session; two weeks later, his income assured, he married Rosanna Hunter, his late master's sister, with whom he had formed an early bond; their marriage provided continued support for one of Hunter's two dependent siblings (another sister, Mary, soon married Rev. Joseph Davenport, rector of York County's

Charles Parish); it was also his second link to the Hunters. In his will, the late master printer had offered Royle a half-interest in the office if the journeyman would conduct the business for the equal benefit of himself and his "natural [i.e. illegitimate] son" William Jr. (231), who had been born to one Elizabeth Reynolds before his English journey (she was not part of the deal, however, as Hunter never married her). Royle accepted Hunter's conditions, securing new financing for the office from merchant William Holt, securing the loan with the office's apparatus; Royle's financier was also a brother of John Holt (222), formerly Williamsburg's mayor who was married to Hunter's oldest sister, Elizabeth, and who had recently set-up a press of his own in New York City, making the business transaction one within the larger sphere of an extended family; in forging these personal and professional alliances, Royle put himself firmly in control of his own destiny.

The only element of Hunter's legacy that Royle did not acquire was his role as the deputy postmaster for Britain's North America colonies; that plum went to John Foxcroft, personal secretary of the new resident governor in Virginia, Francis Fauquier. This change in the pre-existing arrangements reflects Fauquier's instructions to reassert the royal prerogative, and so limit dissent within the colony, in part, by monitoring the flow of information there. Controlling the content of the weekly *Virginia Gazette* – which did not miss a beat in the transition from Hunter to Royle – was part of that effort. As a later commentary reported, it was common knowledge during the Royle years that his newspaper "was constantly carried to a certain house in Palace street to be inspected before it could be seen by the publick." So when political tensions began to rise after 1763, Royle found himself pressed from two directions: the governor and the House of Burgesses, with each wanting to use him and his press for their ends. As Royle then chose to follow Fauquier's directives, the suspicions attending his arrival now found confirmation in his actions.

Controversy

The pivotal test for Royle came in the spring and summer of 1765 with the Stamp Act crisis; his actions then are the source for the subsequent portrayals of him as someone hostile to the interests of Virginians. Once news of Parliament's enactment of the acts reached North America – one that imposed new taxes intended to raise the monies needed to retire the debt from the recent war with France (1754-63) and pay for the administration of Britain's now-larger empire – a fierce political debate erupted. In Virginia, the General Assembly was meeting when that news arrived in May, inducing Patrick Henry to propose five resolutions opposing the act and rejecting Parliament's authority to enact such legislation; the House of Burgesses passed four of them and ordered they be published in Royle's *Gazette*. Incensed, Fauquier had the resolutions torn from the manuscript journal of the House, ordered Royle not to publish them, and dissolved the Assembly. Eventually, the "Virginia Resolves" did find receptive publishers, starting with the nearby *Maryland Gazette* but they never found space in Royle's paper, in conformance with Fauquier's order. Shortly thereafter, Royle published a commentary written by Pennsylvanian Joseph Galloway (1731-1803) that argued a middle ground between the two extremes of the dispute, an essay that was published in only one other American paper, that of David Hall (Benjamin Franklin's partner) in Philadelphia. In this attempt to broaden the debate, Royle came across, at best, as supporting Parliament,

or at worst, an unthinking tool of the now-reviled governor. Royle clearly felt threatened by the tense situation in the Virginia capital, just as his health began to fail; so he quickly left Williamsburg to "recover his health," just as Hunter once had, landing in New York City and the residence of John Holt; he remained there until after the Stamp Act took effect on November 1st, leaving his foreman Purdie to conduct his paper and press in his absence.

Purdie was, of course, still constrained by what Fauquier allowed into print in "his" *Gazette*, which limited Purdie's reporting on the ensuing riots that summer and fall in America's port cities, as well as the continent-wide Stamp Act Congress held in New York that October. That meeting forged a plan of non-cooperation with the act by simply refusing to buy any object or employ any service subject to the tax. Newspapers would require tax stamps, so all of the publishers in the colonies agreed to suspend publication their papers when the act took effect. Hence the final *Virginia Gazette* that was issued by Purdie (on October 26th) included a half-sheet supplement that Fauquier did not censor, whether intentionally so or not being allowed to do so is unclear; the extra described the arrival of the colony's stamp agent, George Mercer, an attorney from Fredericksburg who had been in London for much of that year, and how he had been compelled to accede to the authority of the Assembly, promising not to sell stamps if that body did not want him to issue them – a victory for the Burgesses over the governor and Parliament.

Legacy

Sometime in November 1765, Royle returned to Williamsburg, apparently in expectation of the birth of his second son Hunter (on December 10th); however, the printer still was not a well man, despite his time in New York. The cause of his decline remains unknown, but it was clearly some sort of wasting disease and his end came on rapidly after his return. On Sunday January 26, 1766, the thirty-four-year-old Royle succumbed to his disease, leaving behind a twenty-seven-year-old wife, two infant sons, and a complicated estate that would not be settled until early 1775.

Royle's estate was still linked to young Billy Hunter as a result of his father's 1761 will; now Royle attempted a similar entailment to provide for Hunter and his sons; in his will, he allowed Purdie a share of the family's printing business if he would provide for all three of the boys. But Purdie declined the offer, determined to chart his own course in business, free of encumbrances from his predecessors. He forged a partnership with John Dixon Sr. (140), a Williamsburg merchant who had also been Royle's business agent; together they crafted a plan to separate the assets of the printing office from both Hunter's and Royle's estates via a business that they alone profited from. Meanwhile, Dixon would provide for all the minor children on his own, first by becoming Billy Hunter's guardian, then by marrying Rosanna Hunter Royle (they would have eight more children together), and finally by assuming the administration of Hunter's and Royle's estates. Thus the new firm of Purdie & Dixon could draw on their predecessor's resources without responsibility for its debts; they bought the printing apparatus Royle had owned, rented the building Hunter had owned to house it, and continued without interruption until Billy Hunter came of age at the end of 1774.

Traditional histories of the Virginia printing trade mark Royle's death as the end of both the printing monopoly in the colony and the start of an "open press" there, but that tale misses the independent course that Purdie followed. Royle had chosen the royal government as his patron and profited by that choice until his death; the subsequent political turmoil did not affect him or his estate. When Purdie assumed control of the office, he knew that Royle's opponents – who had been Stretch's supporters before – were planning to bring William Rind (358) to Virginia to succeed Royle as public printer. His long association with Dixon allowed that older office to continue profitably while slowly separating it from the extensive Hunter-Royle-Holt-Dixon clan; thus Purdie built an identity separate from that of the royal government, unlike his predecessor. Yet Royle profited from his choices as well which, given the imperial dictates of the late 1750s, were likely the only course open to an immigrant printer from England in search of success and stability.

Personal Data

Born: May 1 1732 England [probably Manchester area].
Married: Nov. 19 1761 Rosanna Hunter @ Williamsburg, Virginia.
Died: Jan. 26 1766 Williamsburg, Virginia.
Children: Two sons, William (b. 1764) and Hunter (b. 1765).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Rawson, "Guardians," chaps. 2 & 3; York County Project files for Hunter, Royle, Purdie, and Dixon, CWF; notices in Royle's *Virginia Gazette* (1761-66); *Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie*; *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*; genealogical data from Heritage Consulting Millennium File posted on Ancestry.com (February 2013).