

370 SAPPINGTON, G. W. – [GEORGE WASHINGTON SAPPINGTON]

Publisher

Shepherdstown

Publisher of *The Informer & Advertiser* (1819-20) at Shepherdstown.

Sappington had only a brief affiliation with the Virginia printing trade, serving as founding publisher of Shepherdstown's short-lived *Informer & Advertiser*. As its titular proprietor in the firm of G.W. Sappington & Co., he appears to have been the journal's financier/editor as no further trace of his tradecraft has been found in the bibliographic record; moreover, his subsequent occupations show close connections with the mercantile interests of Jefferson County, where he lived out most of his life, indicating that he was not a trained printer, but rather an employer of printers.

The *Informer* was evidently a venture that continued an effort by locals to produce a journal to compete with county's established paper-of-record, *The Farmer's Repository*, published at Charlestown by Richard Williams (447). That Republican sheet was challenged at least twice by Federalist weeklies in the three years before Sappington's *Informer* first appeared: *The American Eagle* conducted initially (1816-17) by John. N. Snider (392), and then (1817-19) by the successive firms of Maxwell (283) & Harper (202) and Robinson (361) & Harper; the latter partners closed their *Eagle* in spring 1819 to recast it as the *Potomack Register*, but that iteration was also dead by the time that Sappington began publishing in August 1819. That timing suggests that Sappington, then just nineteen or twenty years-old, drew on well-known local supporters to acquire the Robinson & Harper press office in order to attempt a third challenger to Williams.

Only one issue of the *Informer* has survived, indicating just how marginal the paper was, and that survivor was produced in 1820 by Thomas Trice (418) who succeeded Sappington; as that issue was number 45 of the first (and only) volume, it seems that Sappington may have been a part of the venture for just six months before he transferred ownership to the like-minded Trice – both were Whig political figures in the 1830s. And as a new opposition journal began in Shepherdstown in September 1820 – *The Virginia Monitor* of Maryland physician Edward Bell (029) – it also seems that Trice sold his newly-acquired press and paper at the end of that first volume in August 1820.

Sappington would not be associated with another journal. But he did become an influential figure in the neighborhood. He served as county sheriff for several years in the 1830s and 1840s, before he bought and renovated a "Large and very Commodious three-story Brick Hotel" in Charlestown in April 1845. Campaigning for office placed Sappington in the circle of the noted Whig editor-publisher John S. Gallaher (177); he had started the *Virginia Free Press* at nearby Harper's Ferry in 1821, before moving on to Richmond in 1835 where he would later join with John Hampden Pleasants (330) to publish the *Richmond Whig*; in 1838, Gallaher was part of a group of Jefferson County merchants who formed a corporation to buy and operate a struggling resort there, the Shannondale Springs, located on what had been the plantation of Ferdinando Fairfax (160); shortly after opening his hotel, Sappington became a part of that group, evidently managing the resort for the corporation until 1859, when a fire destroyed the lodgings there. He was also a part of a plan in 1847 by those same

Jefferson County Whigs to build a new turnpike between Charlestown and Berryville on the Frederick County border, so linking his home town to Winchester. By that time, he was also recognized as "Captain Sappington," a leader of the county militia.

Still, his hotel was his primary business concern, growing to an asset valued at \$12,000 in the 1850 census, and then housing 28 boarders. But after the resort fire, he appears to have chosen to follow less-intensive work as he aged; newspaper notices appeared that offered "Sappington's Hotel" for sale, while its long-time proprietor became "steward" of Hampden-Sydney College in distant Prince Edward County as part of the administration of the school's new president, John Mayo Pleasants Atkinson. The start of the Civil War, however, brought that employment to an end, as the college's students scattered into military service. He may have returned to Jefferson County then, as the hotel finally changed hands at that time. But by war's end, Sappington was apparently dead. His namesake son, a well-known lawyer in his time, was murdered in September 1865 in a train depot at Glade Spring in southwest Virginia; his published obituaries did not mention his father, even while they spoke of other family members, clearly suggesting that Sappington predeceased his son.

In the 1870 census, his widow, Eliza, is recorded as living in Charlestown with their youngest daughter in markedly reduced financial circumstances. On her death, she left a spare estate that held a large minority interest in the defunct Shannondale Springs; her grand-daughter was part of a lawsuit in 1886 that sought to terminate the corporation and sell the resort property to benefit a small group of descendants of those who had owned shares when the resort burned. The ensuing court-sanctioned dissolution led to a revival of the resort by new hands in the 1890s. Today, the property is part of the National Conservation Training Center of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Personal Data

Born:	ca. 1800	Probably in Jefferson County, VA/WV
Married [1]:	ca. 1820	Unknown, probably @ Jefferson County, VA/WV
Married [2]:	Jan. 8 1824	Eliza J. Cramer @ Jefferson County, VA/WV
Died:	before 1865	Unknown
Children:	At least three by 1st wife: George W. Jr. (b. 1821); Ann C. (b. 1831); Sarah E. (b. 1832). At least one by Eliza: Frances S. (b. 1845).	

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Norona & Shetler; Bushong, *Jefferson County*; Theriault, *History of Shannondale Springs*; notices in *National Intelligencer* (1819-65), *Alexandria Herald* (1825-61), [Harper's Ferry/Charlestown] *Virginia Free Press*, (1835-75), and [Shepherdstown] *Spirit of Jefferson* (1845-54); Federal Decennial Census (1840-70); West Virginia Vital Records posted on Ancestry.com (March 2013).

Both Brigham and Norona & Shetler incorrectly record this publisher's name as "W. Sappington," citing a notice in the *National Intelligencer* of September 1, 1819; that notice actually states that the proprietor is "G.W. Sappington & Co." who issued the paper's first number on August 5th.