

379 SHEPHERD, SAMUEL

Printer & Publisher

Richmond, Norfolk

Publisher of *The American Beacon and Commercial Diary* (1815-16) at Norfolk as partner to Hamilton Shields (380), William C. Shields (381), and Henry Ashburn (015); proprietor of job printing firms in Richmond (1816-49) first as partner to William Pollard (336) and then to Thomas Ritchie (360); Printer to the Commonwealth (1835 & 1840-48); also a son-in-law of Augustine Davis (119).

Shepherd is a tragic figure in the Virginia printing trade, dying by his own hand in the midst of a political controversy over his performance as the public printer, after having striven for more than thirty years to separate himself from the partisan turmoil found in Richmond.

Beginnings

A native Virginian, Shepherd both trained and later worked in the Richmond press office of Augustine Davis, which led to his marriage to his master's eldest daughter Maria. In the capitol, he came to know two brothers named Shields who played pivotal roles in forming his independence as a journeyman. Both were younger brothers of the first wife of Leroy Anderson (011), a well-connected schoolmaster and essayist from Williamsburg; after her death in 1808, the brothers relocated to Virginia from their native Philadelphia to pursue differing opportunities tied to Anderson. The elder of the two, Hamilton Shields, settled in Smithfield in about 1810 to conduct a school there, apparently in collaboration with the one that Anderson ran in Richmond. Meanwhile, younger brother William C. Shields, a trained printer, came to Richmond to work as a journeyman in about 1811. In May 1813, Anderson launched the city's first successful daily paper, the non-partisan *Richmond Compiler*; he used various Richmond job-printers as his tradesmen until late 1814, when he took William Shields in as his partner in the venture. It may have been that Shepherd worked in the *Compiler* office as well at that time, as his first attempt at an independent tradesman came just six months later, with Hamilton Shields, in a Norfolk journal emulating the *Compiler*.

Shepherd moved to Norfolk in early 1815, following the end of the War of 1812, in which he served in a volunteer regiment from Richmond that had been sent to the Niagara frontier. There he formed a partnership with the elder Shields to conduct the *American Beacon and Commercial Diary*. The pairing was well-calculated; both were veterans of the recent war, so holding patriotic reputations; Shields in particular was a local military hero, having quit his Smithfield school when the war began to lead an Isle of Wight County rifle company that repulsed a British raid on Hampton during the war; his local standing and Shepherd's trade skills made their new paper a more-than-viable proposition; the pair quickly brought in a practical printer, Henry Ashburn (015), to conduct an allied job-printing office for them that quickly became the busiest such shop in the port city; in April 1816, Shepherd and Shields made Ashburn a full partner in that ancillary operation.

This original alignment of the *Beacon* office continued until mid-1816 when changes in the press offices of Richmond led to new arrangements in Norfolk. Leroy Anderson retired from

the *Compiler* shortly after the *American Beacon* began publication in Norfolk in 1815; William C. Shields became partner to a new editor, one Louis Hue Girardin (180), formerly a professor at the College of William & Mary then conducting a school in Richmond; a year later, in May 1816, the firm of Girardin & Shields sold their successful *Compiler* to a new firm headed by Philip DuVal (155) and Daniel Trueheart (420) and dissolved; Shields took his proceeds from that sale to Norfolk, where he acquired Shepherd's interest in the *American Beacon* that August, so joining his older brother as a full partner in the venture; in turn, the transaction allowed Shepherd to return to Richmond and open a new job-printing firm in conjunction William Pollard; their firm was quickly contracted by journalist Thomas Ritchie, the state's newly-elected public printer, to print the government documents that he was now required to produce. The timing clearly suggests that this was a coordinated transition in both cities, as does the lengthy association that Ritchie now forged with both Shepherd (1816-40) and the *Compiler* office (1816-33). Hence Shepherd would print the state's official documents for the next thirty-three years (1816-49), either as Ritchie's subcontractor or as public printer in his own right. As a result, much of Shepherd's production has been masked under Ritchie's name and so has gone unrecognized.

Maturity

That background role was one that Shepherd embraced as he distanced his new press from the partisan journalism of his day. After departing Norfolk in 1816, he never again published a newspaper. Rather, he made his Richmond office into the first one there that specialized in producing legal imprints, both the government documents contracted for by Ritchie and the growing number of case reports and law guides that were needed to sustain Virginia's court system. Initially, he had supplemented his government work with religious imprints, as did many of the state's job presses, producing both the minutes of the annual meetings of central Virginia's Baptist associations and sermons from evangelical Presbyterians like Rev. John Holt Rice (354). The work was enough for him to accommodate four tradesmen in his residence by 1820. But in 1824, the focus of his production changed when bookseller Peter Cottom (107) engaged Shepherd to republish the first three volumes of Daniel Call's reports on cases of Virginia's Supreme Court of Appeals. His skill in producing those volumes quickly brought a contract from the legal scholar and writer William Waller Hening (213) to publish the fourth (and final) edition of his celebrated *New Virginia Justice*, a handbook that he had laboriously revised and enlarged after passage of the Revised Code of 1819.

Thereafter, Shepherd regularly published the law-case reports compiled by the noted court reporters Benjamin Watkins Leigh (12 vols. 1830-44), Conway Robinson (2 vols. 1843-44), and Peachey Ridgway Grattin (4 vols. 1845-49), among others. He also produced annual reports for the state's Board of Public Works and the Virginia State Library, work contracted separately from the public-printing concession. In 1828, he was asked by the U.S. House of Representatives to examine and report on the business practices of the printers to Congress, the Washington firm of Gales & Seaton, and so assess the validity of the increasing cost of producing government documents. By the mid-1830s, Shepherd was so widely recognized for his expertise in law printing that he was contracted by the General Assembly to produce a *Supplement to the Revised Code of the Laws of Virginia* in 1833, a

volume covering laws passed after the 1819 revision, and then a three-volume continuation of Hening's monumental compilation of early Virginia laws – *The Statutes at Large* – picking up the unfinished project in 1792 and carried it through the laws of the 1806 Assembly, a work he issued in 1834 and 1835 that has been called "Shepherd's Statutes."

Despite this distancing from political journalism, Shepherd could not avoid the partisan conflicts that roiled the General Assembly throughout his printing career. As early as 1826, individuals in the Assembly who were opposed to continuing Ritchie in the public-printing position proposed that Shepherd be appointed in Ritchie's place as it was the printer who actually produced the government work, not the journalist. Ritchie reported in the pages of his *Enquirer* that Shepherd thought their arrangement more than fair:

"They say that I employ a printer to do the work at most inadequate wages, and skim the cream myself; when it is a fact that Shepherd, the best printer in the Commonwealth, and equal to any in the Union, receives a salary of \$850, besides being as much interested in the profits as I am, that is just one third. When I proposed three years ago to resign, Shepherd would not let me. He was pleased to say such had been my liberality he could not consent to lose me."

Ritchie's mention of "three years ago" referred to the reorganization of Shepherd's business when Pollard acquired an interest in the *Compiler* daily in 1823 and left their firm; at that time, his office became simply known as Samuel Shepherd & Co. – with Ritchie being one of his unnamed partners. Their alliance was one based on profit and not politics, as Shepherd was well known to be a supporter of the incumbent president, John Quincy Adams, while Ritchie was evolving into a Jacksonian as a result of an ongoing association with Martin Van Buren; this placed Ritchie in opposition to both the nascent Whig party in the state and the tidewater conservatives who would later support John C. Calhoun against Jackson.

Both political elements tried repeatedly to remove Ritchie from the 1826 Assembly onward, using the logic that the post was a "mechanical one" and not a "political sinecure," and that the mechanic should profit from the fruits of his labors. In 1834, those elements succeeded in replacing Ritchie with Shepherd, which brought an end to their long-time partnership in January 1835. Remarkably, the alteration lasted for just one year, as the ensuing Assembly returned Ritchie to the post he had held since 1815, with Ritchie then contracting Shepherd to produce the government work for him, as he had previously – though now his firm was a partnership with John B. Colin, a practical printer like himself. Not surprisingly, complaints about Ritchie continued in the Assembly, particularly as he became ever more identified with the Jackson and Van Buren administrations, and Shepherd was always suggested as the alternative candidate. With the Whig ascendancy in 1840, Ritchie's tenure as public printer came to a final and conclusive end; the Assembly voted overwhelmingly to name Shepherd as public printer, a post he was reelected to annually through 1848.

Ritchie, meanwhile, began shifting his focus to broader, national venues, taking on two of his sons – William Foushee and Thomas Jr. – as partners in the *Enquirer* in 1842 before he accepted an offer in 1845 to edit a Democratic journal in Washington in support of the new administration of James K. Polk. After leaving his beloved *Enquirer* in the hands of his sons, they used his paper to launch brutal, and often unfounded, attacks on the Whigs generally,

and on the *Richmond Whig* editor, John Hampden Pleasants (330), specifically. One result of these attacks was a duel between Pleasants and Thomas Ritchie Jr. in February 1846 that ended with the death of the Whig editor. Another was an attempt at suicide by a financially-pressed Samuel Shepherd.

Demise

The spring elections of 1848 brought the Jacksonians back into control of the Assembly, and as the appointed December day for its meeting approached, it became apparent that that new Democratic majority would remove Shepherd from office in favor of William F. Ritchie, this despite an "agreement" among the delegates that the post was now one that should go to a printer and not a journalist. So the Jacksonian delegates turned their attention to the Whiggish proclivities of the state's public printer and argued (counterfactually) that his election in both 1834 and 1840 had been a political appointment and not professional one, as had been his continuance in office throughout the 1840s. Having invested heavily in the materials that were needed to produce the laws and journals of that Assembly, Shepherd despaired of being unable to recoup that investment; so he tried to ensure that the work would fall to the hands of his partner Colin, and not to Ritchie, by killing himself before the Assembly could meet. The attempt failed, and the wounded Shepherd was compelled to resign his post in disgrace. A spirited debate over his successor ensued during the Assembly session, reported at length and in detail in the *Richmond Whig* and so then "refuted" by the *Richmond Enquirer* (the Ritchie brothers did not address the facts presented, resorting to *ad hominem* attacks instead, as was their practice); the debate ended in February 1849 with a strictly party-line vote appointing Ritchie over Colin.

A week later, Shepherd died of his self-inflicted injuries, apparently the result of infection; neither party's paper carried more than a one line notice of his death the next day. Colin continued their office alone until September, when he took on two young journeyman-printers – John H. Baptist and John Nowlan, who were "long engaged in this office and well acquainted with their profession" – as his new partners in the concern. Shepherd's estate was quietly settled by the Richmond attorney Richard Hill, Jr., so bringing to an end the last trade connection in the city with the Davis family and with it the last tie to the Virginia print trade's roots in the colonial capitol of Williamsburg.

Personal Data

Born: In 1791 in Virginia.
Married: Dec. 26 1818 Maria Davis @ Richmond, Virginia.
Died: Feb. 21 1849 Richmond, Virginia.
Children: Census data indicates 3 sons and 3 daughters born before 1835; their names have not yet discovered.

Sources: Imprints: Brigham; Hubbard on Richmond; Forrest, *Norfolk*; Bryson, *Virginia Law Books*; Federal Decennial Census, 1820-40; notices in [Norfolk] *American Beacon* (1815-16), the *Richmond Enquirer* (1816-49), and the *Richmond Whig* (1835-49), esp. a series of reports on Shepherd and the public-printing concession therein in February 1849.