

382 SHORE, THOMAS

Publisher

Petersburg

Publisher of guide to maritime commerce and postal communication at Petersburg (1819).

Shore was a native of Petersburg who served for more than thirty years as the postmaster in his home town. In that role, he accumulated a wealth of information on the conduct of maritime trade out of that port city and the communication networks based in the national postal system that supported such trade. Shore compiled that information into a merchant handbook in 1819 that he published through the press of Edward Pescud (324).

The long-serving postmaster was first appointed to that position in December 1811 at the young age of twenty; he replaced the locally-celebrated Revolutionary War hero Joseph Jones when that aging Republican was named collector of the port of Petersburg. Shore likely secured the post through his family's connections to members of the James Madison administration – particularly James Monroe, a close friend of his recently deceased father, Dr. John Shore (d. 1808) – which were reinforced by his service as part of the Petersburg Republican Light Infantry (39th Regiment of Virginia Militia) during the Chesapeake/Leopold crisis of 1807. In 1810, Shore strengthened those ties by marrying into the long-prominent Bolling family of Dinwiddie and Chesterfield counties; his union with Mary Harriott Bolling produced eleven children between 1812 and 1835, with at least seven living to adulthood.

In travelling in these social circles, Shore was close to Petersburg's largest merchants, many of whom had known well his uncle, also named Thomas (d. 1800), who had been among the port's earliest maritime traders. So it is not surprising that once he was named postmaster that he would publish a guide-book to assist in the town's commerce. *The Merchant's and Traveller's Companion* he published was a compendium of place information, post offices and routes, insurance rates, and shipping duties, alongside a naval register and distance tables. Shore intended the 1819 guide to be the first in a series, but he never issued another edition of the work; it may be that the larger publishing centers to the northward, which produced similar imprints at a lesser cost, simply pushed his title out of the marketplace.

Shore may also have simply decided to abandon his guidebook as his civic responsibilities mounted over the ensuing quarter century. He served on many *ad hoc* public committees in Petersburg in those years, most notably as part of the town committee formed to solicit and distribute funds for the relief of the victims of the Great Petersburg Fire of July 1815, a conflagration that consumed more than two-thirds of the port's structures. Shore also became a popular local orator, beginning with the speech that he made during ceremonies welcoming home the Petersburg Volunteers from the War of 1812; that performance likely had a considerable local resonance, as his brother John had served in the unit and was killed in the May 1813 siege of Ft. Meigs in the Ohio Territory.

Yet, Shore's role as postmaster provides the most detailed record of events in his lifetime. He was frequently a character in published accounts of the detection and capture of mail robbers in Virginia in the 1820s. But in the 1830s, that positive reputation soured in the minds of Northerners as Shore became involved in attempts to intercept and suppress

items in the U.S. mails that were deemed abhorrent to the values of Virginians. In February 1838, he reported the transmission of an abolitionist tract – an article by "a Presbyterian on the Bible Doctrine of Slavery" in the *Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine* – to city officials, who ordered him to seize and destroy any copies in the mails, as they violated an Act of Assembly passed in the 1836 session; the publicity this event produced in Northern papers made Shore into a notorious personality, even as it is likely that this suppression was not an isolated act. The following year, the Jacksonian Shore was charged by Virginia Whigs with interfering with the circulation of the *Petersburg Intelligencer*, a formerly Federalist paper that now promoted a Whig agenda; Postmaster-General Amos Kendall had ordered local postmasters to count all newspapers passing through each post office in the country as part of a calculation of the expense (i.e. burden) they placed on the postal system; the proprietors of the *Intelligencer* refused to provide a count, so Shore simply detained their papers in his office until he could count them himself; the resulting delay in deliveries raised the specter of suppression once again, given Shore's prior performance. Then in the spring of 1840, Shore was implicated in a scheme of "corruption and espionage in the Post Office Department," in which the franked correspondence of Whig politicians was opened, items removed and destroyed, before being charged for postage in violation of federal law; in Shore's case, it was alleged, and immediately "refuted," that mail and packages addressed to William Cabell Rives, whether franked or paid, was opened and searched in his office; the Whig victory that fall brought this controversy to an end through the prospect of a purge of Jacksonian postmasters under the new Harrison administration.

Shore resigned his post in October 1842, ostensibly because he had decided to remove to St. Louis where his eldest son, another Dr. John Shore, had established a thriving medical practice; that he was promptly succeeded by a local Whig tied to then President John Tyler suggests that Shore knew his days in that long-standing role were numbered. In Missouri, Shore was joined by several of his children and so lived out his days in the bosom of his large family. He died there in December 1847, after just five years away from Petersburg.

Personal Data

Born: Mar. 8 1791 Petersburg, Virginia.
Married: Oct. 25 1810 Mary Harriott Bowling @ Petersburg, Virginia.
Died: Dec. 7 1847 St. Louis, Missouri.
Children: Mary Ann (1812-49); Harriott Elizabeth (b. 1815); Rebecca Marshal (1816-18); Dr. John (1819-1905); Thomas Jr. (1823-49); Richard Bolling (1827-28); Benjamin Rice (1828-68); Lucy Gilliam (1830-36); Roberta Eppes (b. 1832); Samuel Pryor (b. 1833); and Alexander Bolling (1835-36).

Sources: Imprint (S&S 49414); Seagrave, *Artisans & Mechanics*; Scott & Wyatt, *Petersburg*; Lutz, *Chesterfield*; WPA Guide to *Dinwiddie County*; Federal Decennial Census (1820-40); notices in [Richmond] *Virginia Argus* (1811); [Washington] *National Intelligencer* (1815-42), and [New York City] *The Emancipator* (1838); genealogical data from Shore family charts posted on Ancestry.com (March 2013), though birth/death dates from his gravestone (at FindaGrave.com) as result of conflicts in those charts.