

384 SHUTZ, CONRAD A. – [CONRAD ALSTER SHUTZ]

Bookseller, Publisher, Librarian

Alexandria

Bookseller and proprietor of a commercial circulating library in Alexandria (1802-17); also publisher there of a travel narrative from the press of John Westcott (438) in 1802.

Shutz is an enigmatic figure in the Virginia print trade as the only records relating to him yet uncovered are his advertisements in Alexandria's newspapers – notices reflecting a fifteen-year association with the largest circulating library of its day in that Potomac River port.

Similarly, his origins are obscure, though it appears from the concentration of his surname seen in the census records of eastern Pennsylvania that this Shutz descended from one of the several like-named families who settled there between 1731 and 1764, all originating in Bavaria; moreover, this Conrad Shutz most likely was related to the Conrad Shutz (d. 1771) who conducted a paper-making business in Germantown that served Philadelphia's print trade (including the office of Benjamin Franklin), so explaining his use of a distinguishing middle initial. It also may be that this Shutz was the Conrad Shutz conducting a bookselling business in Philadelphia in 1790 when that name appeared in subscriber lists for several New-England-issued titles. Yet such spare evidence of this Alexandria bookseller's origin and identity is essentially circumstantial, not definitive.

In May 1802, Shutz placed a notice in the Alexandria paper of John Westcott announcing his intention to open a commercial circulating library in the town "should an adequate number offer" to subscribe to the venture. He warranted that his library would carry only works "of the most approved authors in History, Romances, Travels, Plays, Novels, Voyages, Poetry, &c." in its catalogue; and to that end, Shutz promptly published a new American edition of a popular English travelogue – *The Life, Travels and Adventures of Edward Wortley Montague, Esq.* – through Westcott's press. Yet it was not until November that Shutz announced the opening of his new library (on December 1st) after having found sufficient encouragement for the project. That lag may have been a result of changing approaches in the book trade then. By 1802, the once complementary functions of lending and selling books had become distinct business models, resulting in an increasing number of retail bookstores in the port and the existence of a non-profit subscription library, the Library Company of Alexandria, founded in July 1794. The largest bookselling concern in Alexandria – that of Peter Cottom (107) & John A. Stewart (402) – had recently dissolved, with each partner abandoning the practice of lending books in their new bookstores. Still, Shutz evidently saw the withdrawal of Cottom & Stewart from the commercial library business as a chance to fill a void.

Over the ensuing fifteen years, "Shutz's Circulating Library" resided in locations of growing size within a block of the intersection of Prince and Fairfax streets, three blocks west of the Alexandria waterfront. The relocations (at least five) were predicated by the growth of the titles Shutz offered, having promised that "every new publication of merit shall be added to the collection as soon as it can be procured." The end of the War of 1812 alone brought more than 100 new titles into his library with the reopening of Atlantic trade. Thereafter, the largest parts of such new items were novels, many in French, suggesting his clientele

was increasingly feminine in character.

Shutz died unexpectedly in August 1817, barely two weeks after another relocation and a major reorganization of his library. Remarkably, that institution survived him for at least another decade, passing first to Alexandria merchant William King, then to Saran Harper on King's death in early 1823, and finally to one D. Martin in 1826, after which it was apparently broken up. From that point on, the lending of books in Alexandria was the purview of the Library Company and remained so until well into the twentieth century.

NB: His surname has been spelled variously as Shutz, Schütz, Scheetz, or Sheetz, with the last variant being the most common spelling today. Version used here reflects his own spelling choice when publishing his name.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1767 Pennsylvania?

Died: Aug. 21 1817 Alexandria, Virginia [then District of Columbia].

No record of wife or offspring yet discovered.

Sources: Imprint (S&S 2536); *Artisans & Merchants*; notices in *Alexandria Advertiser* (1802) and the *Alexandria Gazette* and the *Alexandria Herald* (1802-17).