

### 413 THOMSON, DOUGLAS

Printer, Publisher

Alexandria

Publisher of the weekly literary journal *The Alexandrian* (1820-21) with Henry Pittman (327); also publisher of a collection speeches at Alexandria (1820) with one Hawe (206).

Thomson has left only a fleeting presence in the historical record, largely as a result of his association with printer Henry Pittman in Alexandria in the winter of 1820-21. That trace suggests that he was a young journeyman who briefly rose to ownership before falling back into the ranks of the unnamed printers who labored in the national capital's press offices.

Where Thomson originated or trained is unknown, but he emerged in Alexandria as a fully-trained independent craftsman in February 1820. At that time, he was advertising proposals to publish a book in conjunction with a partner named Hawe – likely Patrick J. Hawe, later an editor of Leesburg's *Washingtonian*. The firm of Hawe & Thomson produced a collection of speeches that spring by the barrister Charles Phillips, an advocate for Irish rebels and English radicals in British courts, seeking subscribers and offering copies for sale in both of the city's daily papers until July. While the Phillips book was a moderate success, it was also the last imprint the firm produced as their concern soon became a casualty of the shifting partnerships that spread through the Alexandria print trade that in 1820.

The appearance of their new press office came during the negotiations that spring for the sale of the *Winchester Republican* to Samuel H. Davis (126), owner of a job-printing office in Alexandria. When he relocated to Winchester early that summer, his Alexandria press went up for sale; it was sold to the new firm of Pittman & Thomson in September, meaning that the alliance between Thomson and Hawe lasted perhaps six months. immediately, the new concern proposed publication of a thrice-weekly mercantile paper using the Davis press; that project, however, did not come to fruition, likely a result of a lack of interest in a port city that supported two daily papers, whose content was regularly one-half advertisements. The partners were not deterred, turning instead to a plan to resurrect the literary weekly that Davis had published with that press between June 1819 and May 1820, the *Columbian Telescope*, but as a thrice-weekly one with advertising notices not seen in the preceding journal. An unexpected inability to procure paper for the project delayed their planned November 1st start by two weeks; but once properly supplied, the new firm of Pittman & Thomson began issuing *The Alexandrian: A Commercial, Agricultural, and Literary Journal* on November 16th.

The fate of their new journal was doomed, however, within weeks. In February 1821, John Corse (106) withdrew from his decade-long partnership with Nathaniel Rounsavell (367) in publishing the *Alexandria Herald*. The firm of Corse & Rounsavell was quickly succeeded by that of Rounsavell & Pittman. This meant that Pittman was now essentially in competition with himself, and with the *Alexandria Gazette* of Samuel Snowden (393), so potentially damaging the finances of each of his two partnerships. In this new mix, *The Alexandrian* was abandoned in short order, closing after just nineteen weeks on March 31, 1821.

Pittman & Thomson soon sold its material assets to the firm of Rounsavell & Pittman, with Thomson then fading into the background. The bibliographic record suggests that he never rose to ownership of a press or publishing business again. Rather it appears that he crossed the Potomac to Washington proper to find work as a journeyman in one of the many press offices there. But the change did not improve his fortunes; Thomson's final appearance in the newspaper record was in April 1823, when he was listed as an insolvent debtor seeking relief in the courts of the District of Columbia. His further fate remains unknown.

***Personal Data***

Married: Feb. 1821 Eliza Cranston @ Alexandria, Virginia.

No other personal data yet discovered.

Sources: Imprint (*Speeches of Charles Phillips* [Alexandria, D.C.: Hawe & Thomson, 1820]); notices in *Alexandria Herald* (1820-23) and the *Alexandria Gazette* (1820-22).