

419 TRISLER, GEORGE

Printer, Publisher

Winchester

Printer of *The Virginia Gazette and Winchester Advertiser* (1789-91) for Matthias Bartgis (024) and Nathaniel Willis (450); later publisher of the *Triumph of Liberty* (1799-1803) at Winchester, initially with John Hass (205).

Trisler was a trained printer who conducted two different papers in Winchester, the first as an employee and the second as a proprietor. However, the financial uncertainties of the early-Republic print trade caused him to turn to mercantile pursuits in Frederick, Maryland, that proved not only more profitable, but also made him a respected social leader there.

Secondary sources differ on many of the aspects of Trisler's life, often in contradiction with one another and with the imprint record itself. Yet it is certain that he was a native of Frederick, Maryland, and that that market town was at the center of his long life. Born there in 1768, he is reported to have been the son of German-American parents who came to Frederick from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania before his birth; yet no record of their names or those of any of his siblings have been found. He received a solid education in his youth and so was conversant in the language and culture of both the German and English communities there, a characteristic exhibited in Trisler's widely-reported poetical abilities. He was trained as a bilingual printer in the Frederick office of publishing entrepreneur Matthias Bartgis, and would maintain an on-again, off-again relationship with Bartgis for the duration of his print trade career.

Between 1785 and 1790, Bartgis established a series of newspapers along the stretch of the Great Eastern Valley from York, Pennsylvania, to Staunton, Virginia; the paper he opened in nearby Winchester in July 1787 – *The Virginia Gazette and Winchester Advertiser* – was the town's first, operated in conjunction with Henry Willcocks (445), another practical printer. Even with a proprietary interest in the paper, Willcocks had only a short-term commitment to Bartgis; he left the office in January 1788 to join with Richard Bowen (045) in publishing his competing *Virginia Centinel or Winchester Mercury* that April. Bartgis advertised for another assistant for his Winchester office, "a Journeyman Printer Who is a Master of the German language," but found another short-term partner instead; Nathaniel Willis was a Bostonian who had until recently published the *Independent Chronicle* there and who now set out to practice his trade in the lower Shenandoah Valley. Bartgis was happy to have the experienced Willis in charge of the Winchester press office, but as Willis was not "a Master of the German language," he still needed a bilingual assistant there – and the young Trisler was a suitable choice close at hand.

Dispatched to Winchester to assist Willis, Trisler would remain there until late 1791. His presence was crucial, as Willis left at the end of 1789, when his agreement with Bartgis ended, leaving Trisler the *de facto* proprietor of a paper published by an absentee owner. By December 1791, however, Bartgis was visibly overextended; the business he had started just five years earlier had become a complex mix of journals and ancillary enterprises; now, facing determined competition everywhere he published a newspaper, a retrenchment was

in order and his *Winchester Advertiser* was an early casualty.

Trisler seems to have been surprised by the closing. One account reports that it created an acrimonious split between master and journeyman, so explaining why he now abandoned the trade. Trisler did not return to Frederick as one might expect, given his roots there, nor did he have another trade association with Bartgis; rather, he moved to Baltimore to learn the dry-goods business from Henry Schroeder, a large importer and distributor of linens and staples from Germany and Ireland. After three years with Schroeder, Trisler returned to Frederick to establish his own retail store there. His large mercantile establishment on Main Street was a fixture there for the next forty years, even as Trisler pursued other interests along the way. Perhaps the most absorbing of those pursuits were political ones, with the young merchant-printer embracing the Republican cause, unlike the Federalist inclinations of his merchant contemporaries. He was an active voice in supporting Jefferson during the 1796 election and was disenchanted with the ensuing Adams administration. So he set out to publish a paper that would support Jefferson and other Republicans in the 1800 election.

Winchester would again be the locale for this new journalistic venture. In July 1799, Trisler established a new printing office there in conjunction with John Hass and began issuing the weekly Jeffersonian paper, the *Triumph of Liberty*. Hass likely stayed with the project for a year or so – through the 1800 election, at least – before Trisler assumed sole ownership. He brought in journeymen from Maryland and Pennsylvania to conduct the press office while he shuttled between his Winchester press and his Frederick store. His paper clearly had local support, as evinced by its ability to survive the Federalist challenge of Bowen's *Virginia Centinel*, and its subsequent evolution into the long-lived *Republican Constellation*. But after four years, Trisler manifestly tired of the grind. In late 1803 or early 1804, Trisler sold his *Triumph of Liberty* and its press to the partnership of Isler & Harmer who recast the weekly as the *Independent Register*. Both partners had worked for Trisler; Peter Isler (235) was a Pennsylvania-trained printer who joined Trisler sometime in 1803; Joseph Harmer (201) had trained in the office under Trisler and Isler, and now joined Isler in acquiring their master's office as independent tradesmen.

With his partisan journal in reliable hands, Trisler returned to Frederick and his dry-goods business. He remained an active political voice in Frederick County, supporting Jefferson, Madison, and then Jackson, in addresses published in amenable area newspapers. In 1821, he was appointed one of the justices of the peace for Frederick County, apparently the only public position he ever held. But his only subsequent publishing ventures were literary, not political; his poetry frequently found space in at least a dozen papers (including those of Bartgis) published in Maryland (Frederick, Baltimore), Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, Montrose), the District of Columbia (Washington, Georgetown), and Winchester over the ensuing thirty years, with publisher John B. Colvin evincing a special affinity for Trisler's verse in his various Frederick and Washington journals. More than one attempt was made in those years to issue a collection of his poetry in book form, but those subscription-publishing efforts apparently fell short, as no record of that imprint has been found.

Trisler married three times in his life, the last coming in October 1827. Shortly thereafter, the sixty-year-old merchant took on a younger partner to help him manage his business, one Elias Hart, and offered the residence above the store for rent; that notice suggests that his family was a small one – especially as only one daughter is known, and then only by her obituary – and that after this marriage he withdrew to the countryside in semi-retirement with that new wife. In those later years, Trisler was known to be "the life and soul of the social circle" in Frederick, being one who "always had something to say that was pleasant and laughable." And it was that quality that was the focus of memorials published upon his death in September 1845 – notices that did not mention his early life as a printer.

Personal Data

Born: In 1768 Frederick, Maryland.
Married [1]: In 1794 Kittie Breidenbough @ Baltimore, MD (d. 1795).
Married [2]: Dec. 26 1799 Roseanna Wetzel @ Winchester, Virginia (d. 1826).
Married [3]: Oct. 11 1827 Susan Kurtz @ Baltimore, Maryland.
Died: Sept. 9 1845 Frederick, Maryland.
Children: Only one found: Henrietta (d. 1838), apparently by Roseanna.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Wust, "George Trisler;" Scharf, *Western Maryland*; Russell, *Winchester*; Minick, *Printing in Maryland*; Cartmell, *Pioneers*; notices in numerous Frederick (1799-1828) and Baltimore (1794-1845) newspapers.