

**424 WAGGONER, J. C. – [JOSEPH CUNNINGHAM WAGGONER]**

**Printer**

**Fincastle**

Printer in the Fincastle press office of Joseph F. Caldwell (073) from 1820 to 1823; then in Caldwell's office in Lewisburg from 1823 to 1831.

Waggoner's participation in the Virginia print trade is recorded only in the uncited source materials behind a 1923 history of West Virginia. He has not been tallied in the catalogue of Virginia imprints, yet that history presents him as the tradesman responsible for the first newspaper issued in Greenbrier County, even as his name does not appear in it.

The entirety of Waggoner's trade career was manifestly tied to Joseph F. Caldwell, a printer and lawyer from Winchester; he and his brother James (071) were trained in the printing offices there and had to leave their hometown to establish themselves as independent tradesmen – James to Warrenton in 1819, then Joseph to Fincastle in 1820. As Waggoner came from Culpeper County, near to Warrenton, it may be that he had his first contact with the print trade there through James Caldwell; but the stated start of his career came after his parents removed to Botetourt County and he encountered Joseph Caldwell in Fincastle.

Caldwell had relocated to that market town in April 1820 and by July was issuing the *Herald of the Valley* there. The journal that he produced proved to be the right effort at the right time: it survived, in various guises, until 1858 unlike its short-lived 1801 predecessor. For the *Herald's* first two years, Caldwell published the paper under his name alone; but in mid-1822, he took on a partner, an English immigrant named William E. Robinson, evidently as part of a plan to move on to new opportunities further west. The formal transfer of the paper to Robinson came in May 1823; by November, Caldwell had relocated to Lewisburg, the seat of Greenbrier County some 50 mile to the west, and had started a new paper there.

Waggoner is reported to have been a part of Caldwell's office from its start in 1820, and that he journeyed to Lewisburg with Caldwell. Accounts of the commencement of printing there are all derived from James Morton Callahan's *History of West Virginia* (1923) which reports the date of the move as 1820, but the imprints themselves evince the chronology above. Those accounts also report that Waggoner was sixteen at the time of the move; if so then his stated birth date of 1802 is also incorrect and should be 1807 instead. But all of the data on Waggoner himself seen in family histories repeat Callahan's story, often verbatim.

The weekly that Caldwell and Waggoner issued in Lewisburg – *The Palladium of Virginia and Pacific Monitor* – was the town's first. Again some local historians have incorrectly claimed it to be the first issued west of the Blue Ridge when that honor belongs to Morgantown (1804) in reality. The persistence of such a distortion probably lies in the importance that the *Palladium* had in the Greenbrier and New River valleys during the Jacksonian era. It was a journal that focused on the development of that region of Virginia. But Caldwell was also engaged in other enterprises that assisted the development his paper advocated; he was a practicing attorney, managed a land-agency, taught at the Lewisburg Academy, operated the existing postal route with Charleston, and established new mail-stages linking New Bern, North Carolina with the Ohio River at Huntington, via Lewisburg. His ancillary activities

evidently pulled Caldwell away from the *Palladium*, leaving Waggoner to be the person associated with the journal as he handled the day-to-day activities of their office – so the assignment of credit for Caldwell's successful and long-lived paper to Waggoner.

In March 1832, Caldwell sold his paper and office to Edward B. Bailey with the fiscal support of Dr. John McElhenney, the Presbyterian minister who founded and then still led the Lewisburg Academy – and the cleric who officiated at Waggoner's 1825 wedding. Although the partner's promptly changed the weekly's title to *The Alleghanian*, they remained loyal to the *Palladium's* long-standing political perspective.

Waggoner was still a relatively young man in 1832, not yet forty. Yet it appears that he retired from the print trade at that time and settled into the life of a gentleman farmer for the remainder of his life. As the sectional crisis deepened in the 1850s, his loyalties became Unionist ones, and not secessionist, just as had those of Caldwell, his "lifetime friend." So he also supported the separation of the western Virginia counties from the state's eastern ones in 1861, and Caldwell's embrace of the Republican party in the post-war government. But as he aged, his energies waned, and he withdrew to his farm outside of Lewisburg; Waggoner died there in January 1879 – honored locally but forgotten beyond Greenbrier's limits.

### ***Personal Data***

Born:	ca. 1802	Culpeper County, Virginia.
Married:	Nov. 1825	Sarah C. B. Venable @ Lewisburg. VA /WV.
Died:	Jan. 1879	River Hill, near Lewisburg. VA /WV.
Children:	At least three sons: Andrew Jackson; James Polk; and William Wirt.	

Sources: Callahan, *History of West Virginia*; Rice, *Greenbrier County*; bibliographic data from Caldwell entries in Brigham, Cappon, and Norona & Shetler.