

430 WARROCK, JOHN

Printer, Publisher

Richmond

Proprietor of a job-press in Richmond (1809-58) and publisher of the long-lived *Warrock's Virginia and North Carolina Almanac*; associated prior to that with William Prentis (340) and Thomas Nicolson (315); cousin of Robert M. Bransford (049) and Samuel Bransford (050).

Warrock was a legendary figure in the antebellum Virginia print trade, having practiced his craft actively for at least seventy years at his death in 1858, making him "the oldest printer in the South" then and, perhaps, the oldest in the country as well.

Born in Richmond in late 1773, Warrock grew up amidst the transformation of that colonial-era river port into the capital city of the Commonwealth of Virginia with its growing number of printing offices. He was the son of an apothecary, Ludovic (or Lewis) Warrock (1727-74), a Scottish immigrant who arrived in Virginia before 1762; his mother was Mary Bransford of Chesterfield County, a daughter of John Bransford (d. 1768), an English immigrant who had acquired original town lots in Richmond from William Byrd II in 1742; thus, Warrock grew up in a wood-frame house built on that property at Nineteenth and Franklin Streets.

Beginnings

Three grandsons of John Bransford would enter the Virginia print trade: first Robert Mosby Bransford (b. 1770) in Richmond and Lynchburg, then John Warrock (b. 1773) in Richmond or Petersburg, and lastly Samuel Bransford (b. 1778) in Lynchburg; all three men may have worked together in the capital's printing offices, as the Bransford cousins – the sons of Mary Bransford's brothers, James and John – resided in Richmond for a time in their adolescence while attending common schools there. Cousin Robert evidently trained with John Dixon (140), the one-time Williamsburg printing office proprietor who established an office in Richmond in 1780 with Thomas Nicolson and employee William Prentis; Warrock would later be associated with each of those tradesmen, suggesting that he actually made his first acquaintance with them during Bransford's apprenticeship in the early 1780s.

Warrock's extensive obituaries in 1858 reported that he had started in the printing trade in 1788 in the Petersburg office of William Prentis; Prentis had ended his partnership with Nicolson in Richmond in mid-1785 and established the first press office in that Appomattox River port the next winter; as Warrock was then twelve, it is not unlikely that his training began with Prentis's relocation, rather than three years later at fifteen. From the start, he was associated with Prentis's *Petersburg Intelligencer*, his first with a newspaper; he finally appeared as a journeyman printer in that office in 1792, having completed his training at the age of nineteen. In 1794, Warrock returned to Richmond and employment in Nicolson's office, working there until 1799. In that period, Nicolson's office was beset by deteriorating tools and typographical inaccuracies that diminished his master's reputation; the office was also marginalized by the closing of Nicolson's *Virginia Gazette or Weekly Advertiser* in 1797. So it is unsurprising that Warrock left Richmond in 1799 to seek opportunity in locales that were distant from this decaying situation in Richmond.

His first stop was in Baltimore in May 1799, where he worked in the press office of the new *American and Daily Advertiser* published by Alexander Martin, a Bostonian who had been associated with the Virginia essayist John Daly Burk (063) in 1796. But the duration of that employment is uncertain; some sources report he stayed with Martin until the *American* was sold to William Pechin in 1802; however, Warrock was married in 1800 in Hagerstown, Maryland, his next stop as a journeyman, suggesting only a short-term deal with Martin and an earlier removal to Washington County. It is also uncertain how long Warrock labored in Hagerstown, with various sources indicating he left that town anywhere from 1804 to 1810.

What is certain is that by late 1809, Warrock had returned to Richmond with a wealth of practical experience and an aspiration to reestablish himself in the city's print trade as an independent entity. With a new wife and an infant daughter, Warrock took up residence in the Bransford family home in the city's East End and set to work. His only subsequent absences from Richmond were ones associated with his military service during the War of 1812; but those were limited, as he also manufactured paper cartridges (rifle ammunition) for Virginia's public arsenal in the city for much of that conflict.

Master Printer

Warrock pursued job printing exclusively for the rest of his long career, avoiding the pitfalls of journalism in a locale then dominated by the contending partisan journals of Republican editor Thomas Ritchie (360) – the *Richmond Enquirer* -- and Federalist publisher Augustine Davis (119) – the *Virginia Patriot*. Instead, Warrock cultivated a few valuable constituencies that had a recurring need for printing, so augmenting the normal flow of one-off projects that were the forte of job-press concerns.

The first such constituency was embodied in the Freemasons of central Virginia. Warrock issued his first Masonic imprint in early 1811, one detailing the proceedings of the annual meeting in Richmond of delegates of the member lodges of the Grand Lodge of Virginia in December 1810. This was a noteworthy assignment; that assembly contained many fellow print tradesmen who were capable of producing the report themselves, who all deferred its production to Warrock; he was then a newly-initiated Mason, having been inducted into Richmond's Lodge No. 10 in January 1810; hence, the project was both a test of Warrock's commitment to Freemasonry, as well as evidence of his dedication. Over the ensuing forty years, he regularly published the proceedings of the annual Grand Lodge meeting, as well as other works commissioned by Richmond's several lodges. Simultaneously, Warrock served as a Masonic officer at both the state and local levels; he served successively as secretary of Lodge No. 10 (1810-12), Senior Warden (1812-14), Worshipful Master (1814-19), and finally Treasurer (1819-56); he also served as secretary of the Grand Lodge from 1812 to 1817. When he relinquished the last of those offices in 1856, he was presented with an engraved silver goblet as a token of the esteem in which his Masonic brethren held him.

The second constituency was in the religious associations of central Virginia. Such groups were important patrons for early-Republic press offices in Virginia; their patronage also fit nicely with Freemasonry's commitment to Christian ideals without adopting the theology of any particular denomination. Warrock printed mostly for Baptist and Episcopal assemblies,

though his Scottish ancestry evidently brought him a contract to publish a biweekly religious magazine for the Presbyterian evangelical John Holt Rice (354); in September 1816, that Richmond-based minister engaged Warrock to print his revamped *Christian Monitor*; Rice had started that serial as a weekly in June 1815, but suspended publication in June 1816 in order to reorganize the venture; the Warrock-issued version continued until August 1817, when Rice again suspended publication to turn his *Monitor* into a monthly magazine.

Public Servant

Warrock declined to take on the rebuilt *Monitor* as a result of the general reorganization of the city's printing offices that progressed through 1815 and 1816, one that brought him a third constituency: the Senate of Virginia. The sitting public printer, Samuel Pleasants (331), publisher of the venerable *Virginia Argus*, died in October 1814; his extensive business was broken up and dispersed as separate ventures among several of his employees; his printing plant became the property of Arthur G. Booker (041) and Philip DuVal (155); their earliest and most important patron was Rice and his original *Christian Monitor*. But when the firm of Arthur G. Booker & Co. was dissolved in April 1816, the minister decided to reorganize the weekly and find a new printer, which then brought Warrock into the mix. The presses that Pleasants had owned found their way into three new Richmond press offices, including that of William Waller Gray (193) and Nathan Pollard (335); Pollard had a long-standing personal and religious association with Rice, and so when the evangelical resumed publication of the *Monitor* in January 1818, the Franklin Press of Gray & Pollard became its producer.

That change made Warrock's life simpler in the face of the new responsibilities he acquired that same month. With Pleasants dead, Virginia's General Assembly elected a new public printer in January 1815, turning to the incumbent printer to the Senate, Thomas Ritchie, as successor to Pleasants; that election led to a second, with Ritchie's partner and protégé Thomas Burling (066) chosen as his successor with the Senate; but Burling died in January 1818 – by his own hand, it seems, despondent over an impending bankruptcy – leaving the post vacant with the Assembly then in session; the Senate quickly elected the dependable Warrock as Burling's successor; it was an office the printer held for thirty-eight years.

While the work required of him paled in comparison to that of Ritchie – being essentially just the journal and committee reports of the Senate – Warrock was now a key part of the public-printing concession. In that role, he was occasionally employed to produce one-off items throughout his tenure – such as the *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Fix the Site of the University of Virginia* in 1818, a *General Index to the Virginian Law Authorities* in 1819, a set of *Documents Relative to the Literary Institutions of the State* in 1825, and the *New Constitution of Virginia, With the Amended Bill of Rights* in 1852. His ready access to the Assembly's records also led to the City of Richmond engaging him to publish laws and reports relating to the city itself in pamphlets extracted from the "session laws" produced by Ritchie and his successors. In 1852, his long experience with public printing brought him a summons to testify before a select committee of the House of Delegates, chaired by Whig delegate Samuel Granville Staples (1821-1895) of Patrick County, investigating the growing expense of the public's printing under William Foushee Ritchie, a son of and successor to Thomas Ritchie; Staples was unimpressed when the "venerable" printer, then age eighty,

suggested that the monies paid for such printing were reasonably commensurate for the speed and accuracy of the work required.

Populist Publisher

Still, Warrock's greatest social influence was not in his public role, but rather as publisher of an annual almanac, which created his largest constituency: booksellers. In the early days of printing in the capital, each of the main newspaper offices and bookstores there contracted individually for self-branded almanacs, with an intense competition emerging between Pleasants, Davis, and Nicolson in the 1790s over such productions. But by 1820 or so, most retailers of almanacs in Virginia sold the latest edition of a work calculated by a well-known mathematician and produced by a reliable publisher. Warrock issued his first almanac in late 1814 (for 1815) using tables (or ephemerides) drawn by David Richardson (1787-1871) of Louisa County. That *New Virginia Pocket Almanack and Farmer's Companion* became the *Virginia and North Carolina Pocket Almanack* in 1819, and then *Warrock's Virginia and North Carolina Almanack* in 1843. Referred to as "Warrock's Almanac" in contemporaneous accounts, the publication was printed in Richmond in the tens of thousands each year and sold throughout the two states. It appears that Warrock began his annual production in late spring and had finished copies for the next year in circulation among newspaper editors by August, with bulk distributions following shortly thereafter. It also appears that the page-forms containing Richardson's tables were used in a second almanac issued under the title of *Richardson's Virginia and North Carolina Almanack* for a handful of retailers advertised on the title page, indicating that Warrock produced a rival imprint for his mathematician partner, so benefitting from both. After the Civil War, the two were merged into a singular *Warrock-Richardson Almanac* and published annually well into the twentieth century.

Despite his business success, and the respect it generated among his contemporaries, life was hard for Warrock on a personal level. His marriage in 1800 to Eleanor Kirkpatrick, the woman from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania who was the lifelong the focus of his affections, led to the birth of at least seven children, six of them daughters; yet only one daughter survived him. There may have been more children whose brief lives went unrecorded, given the decade-long interval between the births of the two oldest of his known daughters. The later passings of daughter Jane and son John in infancy occasioned the placement of grave markers with ornate, romantic carvings, telling of the depth of their parent's grief; likewise the premature death of youngest daughter Virginia, then in her early thirties, was marked by a similar monument with the addition of a lengthy piece of spiritual poetry.

Yet among the three children who survived infancy, there was only one daughter who gave Warrock a familial heir to his business. Eldest daughter Eleanor was married to a successful Richmond grocer in 1823; her union with Joseph Goode produced a child who lived to adulthood – James Edwin Goode (1837-96); on her death in 1843, her son gravitated toward his grandfather's world; he trained initially in the Richmond office of Thomas Ritchie's sons, before joining his grandfather as his principal assistant. At eighteen, Goode took over day-to-day conduct of that office as Warrock's health began to fail, and succeeded him as the concern's proprietor on Warrock's death in 1858. Remarkably, the young printer was also elected as his grandfather's successor as printer to the Virginia Senate, despite the presence

of more mature tradesmen near at hand, suggesting a more than satisfactory performance for those important patrons over the last two years of Warrock's life.

Dénouement

Those final years were tragic ones for Warrock. In early 1856, his wife died – an event that was said to be a "severe domestic affliction" for the aging printer. In short order, Warrock resigned as a member of his beloved Masonic lodge and turned over the management of his press office to his grandson, citing "the natural effects of advanced age and infirmities of life." That fall, his youngest daughter Virginia died as well, leaving Warrock alone in the old family home at Franklin and Nineteenth Streets. Not long thereafter, in early 1857, Warrock "became paralyzed," an apparent victim of a stroke. Then in August 1857, the infant son of his sole surviving daughter, Sarah, was murdered by his enslaved nurse, who afterward bragged to her peers of throwing the baby off of a second floor porch. Over the ensuing winter, Warrock slowly faded away, weighed down by these mounting travails. He finally breathed his last on March 8, 1858, at the age of "84 years, 4 months and 3 days."

Warrock was buried with high Masonic honors on Shockoe Hill two days later, next to his beloved wife. Evidently, the funeral was attended by every Mason in the city, as well as a large portion of its citizenry. His published obituaries were lengthy and often reprinted elsewhere, with at least one version appearing in a California paper. The *Richmond Dispatch* closed its memorial with the observation that

"Thus he dies, the Father of the Printing Profession in this city. The craft may well emulate that regularity and purity which were the distinguishing traits of his character, and made his face beam with the sunshine of summer, while winter's snows whitened his aged head."

His grandson Goode continued the Warrock press until his death in 1896, issuing the annual almanac every fall. In 1858, that popular work appeared a few weeks early – complete with a biography of the "venerable gentleman" who had long labored over its production.

NB: Surname spelled both *Warrock* and *Worrock*; the latter form was used by the printer's North Carolina cousins, while the Virginia branch used the former, as seen in his imprints.

Personal Data

Born:	Nov. 4	1773	Richmond, Virginia.
Married:	ca.	1800	Eleanor Kirkpatrick @ Hagerstown, Maryland
Died:	Mar. 8	1858	Richmond, Virginia.
Children:	Eleanor Kirkpatrick (b.1801); Elizabeth Duval (c. 1810); John Jr. (1815-16); Sarah (c. 1817), Maria (b. 1819); Jane (1823-27); and Virginia (d. 1856).		

Sources: Imprints; Christian, *Richmond*; Mordecai, *Bye-Gone Days*; *Annals of Henrico Parish*; *Sketches of Virginia*; Fisher, *Monumental Church*; Bryson, *Virginia Law Books*; Walthall, *Richmond Lodge, No. 10*; Woodson, *Woodsons and Connections*; notices in various Richmond newspapers (1811-58); biographical sketch in *Warrock's Almanac...for 1859*.