

431 WARTMANN, LAWRENCE – [ORIGINALLY LAURENTZ WARTMANN]

Printer. Publisher

New Market, Harrisonburg

Printer employed in New Market (1810-14) by Solomon Henkel (218) and in Harrisonburg (1813-15) by George Bourne (043) and Andrew B. Davidson (116); subsequently publisher of the *Rockingham Register* (1822-40) at Harrisonburg.

Wartmann was the craftsman who brought the printing trade to Rockingham County. In doing so, he served two discrete language communities – one German, one English – while fostering a common identity by a focus on local commerce in his newspaper, the first issued in the county seat of Harrisonburg.

A native of Switzerland, Wartmann migrated to the United States from the northeastern canton of St. Gallen in 1797, in anticipation (or so it seems) of the Napoleonic invasion of his birthplace the following year. He settled among German speakers in eastern Pennsylvania, apparently learning the printing trade in the Delaware River port town of Easton, either in the German press office of Jacob Weygandt or the bilingual one of Samuel Longcope. While Wartmann tried to set down roots there by marrying a daughter of that town in 1800, he also developed a reputation as an undependable journeyman with a drinking problem. By 1810, that ill repute had spread to the press offices of western Maryland, a result, it seems, of short and unsatisfactory associations with master printers found in the string of market towns stretching down the Great Appalachian Valley from Easton to Hagerstown.

New Market

In April 1810, Johan Gruber of Hagerstown, the famed German-language almanac publisher, refused to employ Wartmann when offered his services in place of a departing journeyman. That printer, John Jungmann, had been recruited to supervise the New Market press of the Henkel family, then conducted by Solomon Henkel; that four-year-old office was in need of an experienced printer to assist its partially-trained, neophyte conductor, who had just lost the services of the concern's Gruber-trained founder, Ambrose Henkel (214), to the family's long-standing Lutheran ministry; with Jungmann's subsequent decision to not leave Gruber without a suitable replacement, Solomon Henkel was largely compelled to hire Wartmann to resolve his problems in New Market, despite the printer's known deficiencies. Indeed, six months later, Henkel grumbled in a letter to Gruber that his new worker was, as expected, a disappointment, reporting that "Wartmann ist noch Wartmann! [Wartmann is still the same Wartmann!]." However, Wartmann had agreed to a four-year contract with Henkel, needing to support a fast-growing family, meaning that the strained association between proprietor and journeyman would continue until 1814.

By the time Wartmann arrived in New Market, he had developed into a superior tradesman, regardless of his alcoholic tendencies. One commentator noted that in his four years with Henkel, he converted "the rather amateurish printery into a going concern which produced upwards of 10,000 copies of books" from 1811 to 1813. That same commentator suggests that Wartmann's drinking diminished in his years "under the sobering influence of the strict Lutheran Henkel family," but as he did not become a devout Methodist until 1818, it

appears that any sobriety was not fully realized while he was in New Market.

In 1813, Wartmann began seeking his next situation, evidently knowing that his days with the Henkels would end when his contract did. In 1812, he had printed sermons for the Presbyterian evangelical A. B. Davidson, pastor of the Cook's Creek Church in Rockingham County; later that year, Davidson formed a partnership with another Presbyterian minister, George Bourne, to publish religious tracts; needing a printer, and knowing of Wartmann's abilities, they asked him to conduct their new Theological Printing Office in Harrisonburg. As he was still committed to the Henkel Press, Wartmann negotiated a deal whereby he would split his time between the two press offices during 1813, before coming to Harrisonburg on a full-time basis in 1814, once his contract expired. In that year, Bourne and Davidson issued eleven religious pamphlets – seven printed by Wartmann and four by Isaac Collett (100) of Staunton – while creating a Virginia Religious Tract Society to distribute their "cheap pious books [which were] a very useful method of spreading the knowledge of religion." But in the summer of 1814, shortly after Wartmann moved to Harrisonburg, the tract-publishing project came to an abrupt end; Bourne was preaching an anti-slavery message by then, and demanded that Davidson free the one slave that he owned as an example to the faithful; Davidson refused and soon disavowed Bourne and his ministry as heretical; the controversy killed their publishing partnership and drove Bourne from Virginia in late 1815.

Harrisonburg

Despite the loss of his employers, Wartmann was now established in Harrisonburg with a press he could use for job-printing, and he soon found other patrons for his talents. While still working for Davidson & Bourne in 1813, he had printed a long heroic poem focused on Daniel Boone and the Euro-American settlement of Kentucky – *The Mountain Muse* – for a Harrisonburg lawyer named Daniel Bryan (059); it proved to be the first of six literary works that Bryan published in his lifetime. In late 1815, Wartmann printed Bryan's second effort as well, an oration on the education of women that the lawyer had delivered earlier that year. Both works were apparently financed by Bryan himself, or his friends, as each recorded that Wartmann had printed them for Bryan, evidence of the printer's ability to draw profitable contract work. Such was also the case with Ananias Davisson (129), a respected farmer and church father in eastern Rockingham County interested in promoting communal singing in churches; in 1816, Wartmann printed the first known edition of Davisson's popular *Kentucky Harmony*, and there may have been earlier unrecorded editions printed by him as well. That same year, he also printed his first German-language imprint in Harrisonburg, a treatise on immersion baptism by Peter Burkholder, with a vernacular rejoinder from Peter Bowman in 1818, both local ministers; in 1817, he also published a German-language defense of Bible societies by John Brown [Johannes Braun], a local Pietist evangelical. In all, the bibliography of Wartmann's surviving imprints includes eleven titles before 1830, about evenly split between German- and English-language works. This continuing flow of work indicates that Wartmann was not as dependent on either Davidson or Bourne as one may think, and that he functioned well without the patronage of their Presbyterian tract society.

Yet Wartmann's eventual focus was on a weekly newspaper and not these one-off book projects. Such ventures, if managed well, were a steady source of income for small printer-

publishers like Wartmann, and so a key to a successful career. In July 1822, he issued the first number of the *Rockingham Register*, a paper that would serve as the journal-of-record in the county until 1914. Over those years, the *Register* was essential in promoting local development and supporting regional commerce. The weekly was a project that Wartmann produced alone initially, only finding assistance in later years in his adolescent sons. One of their contemporaries, Maria Graham Koontz, painted a vivid portrait of the tradesman as he labored over his newspaper's production in about 1827 in her anecdotal *Recollections of Rocktown now known as Harrisonburg*:

"He had a small folding press on a table in the middle of the room; in either hand he held a leather ball, which was used to ink the type. Then he placed the dampened paper on the type, and turning over the top of the press, screwed it down tight, until the impression was taken; removed the paper, and proceeded in the same manner until the whole edition was finished. ... I have so often looked at the patient old man going through his work so systematically, and thought it a very grand thing to be a newspaper publisher."

Clearly, this was a small-scale operation, meaning that a weekly publishing schedule was all that Wartmann could manage. He continued that schedule uninterrupted until 1838, when he made his oldest son, John Harvey, his partner and foreman. Then sixty-four, Wartmann was apparently feeling the effects of his advancing age, so initiated a transition to the next generation of printing Wartmanns. The printer-patriarch died of pleurisy at his Harrisonburg home in April 1840.

Legacy

The *Rockingham Register* survived its founder by seventy-five years. It was a family-owned concern until about 1875, with the addition of an occasional financial or editorial partner after 1854. But over that time its identity was closely tied to John Harvey Wartmann; in the wake of his father's death, he founded the firm of Wartmann, Way, & Wartmann with his younger brother William McKinley and an older sister's husband, John Gephardt Way; Way seems to have been a part of the Chester County, Pennsylvania, family that conducted press offices in Philadelphia and Washington between 1790 and 1830, so making him a worthy choice to join publishers who were then increasing the size of their page sheet. Still, Way was only a transitional figure, withdrawing from the family's business in 1842, so allowing youngest son Henry Tutweiler to benefit from this profitable patrimony. Both William and Henry were gone by 1854, leaving the weekly in John Harvey's hands alone, the man now associated with the *Register's* reputation as an opponent to northern abolitionism and federal authority in the 1850s and 1860s.

NB: Several sources provide conflicting or inaccurate accounts of Wartmann's life and work; those errors all seem to track back to flaws in the books of John W. Wayland, the legendary Valley historian whose research has often been taken as gospel truth, particularly by his protégé Klaus Wust. The digitized resources employed in this project draw on materials that neither of them saw, nor likely knew existed; so any divergences from their findings seen

here are a result of adding those new materials to their well-known contributions.

Personal Data

Born: July 29 1774 Canton of St. Gallen in Switzerland.
Married: May 25 1800 Esther Scheetz @ Easton, Pennsylvania.
Died: Apr. 18 1840 Harrisonburg, Virginia.
Children: Maria Charlotte (b. 1801); Catharina (b. 1803); Freidrich (b. 1806);
Elisabetha (b. 1808); Rebecca Henkel (b. 1811); John Harvey (b.
1817); William McKinley (b. 1819); Henry Tutweiler (b. 1823).

Sources: Imprints; Cappon; U.S. Newspaper Directory, Library of Congress; Henkel Family Papers, 1801-46, Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia; Dolmetsch, *German Press of Valley*; Wayland, *Historic Harrisonburg, Men of Mark, & Rockingham County*; *Henkel Family Memorial*; Wust, "Bilingual Printers;" Christie and Dumond, *George Bourne; Historical Paper of Washington & Lee*, 1898; Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*; Federal Decennial Census, 1820-50; obituary in *Alexandria Gazette*, May 1, 1840; genealogical data from Wartmann family charts posted on Ancestry.com and USGenWeb.com (April 2013), drawn mostly from biographies of Wartmann's descendants.