

439 WESTCOTT, JOHN, JR.

Printer

Alexandria

Printer in office of *The Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser* (1799-1802) for his father, John Westcott, Sr. (438), and his brother, James D. Westcott (437).

Westcott was a Philadelphia-trained journeyman who was employed in the printing offices established by his brother, James D. Westcott, Sr., and his nephew James D. Westcott, Jr., in Virginia, the District of Columbia, New Jersey, and Florida, among others, before finally landing in Memphis, Tennessee at the end of his life.

Born in January 1775, Westcott was the first of twin brothers who were the sons of John Westcott Sr. (d. 1813) and Sarah Diament (d. 1809). At the time, his father was conducting a school in Bridgeton, New Jersey, site of the first bridge built over the Cohansey River in Cumberland County, off Delaware Bay; he was a third generation scion of an English family that settled the county, and which then owned large tracts of land along the Cohansey in Cedarville, Fairfield, and Bridgeton. But with the outbreak of hostilities in 1776, the father joined the West Jersey Artillery regiment, rising to captain in 1777; he served in the battles of Trenton, Brandywine, Germantown, and Monmouth, purportedly carrying the colors on board the boat carrying George Washington across the Delaware to Trenton – and was so memorialized in a painting (later destroyed) in the New Jersey state capitol building. After the war, he moved his young family to Philadelphia and was soon engaged in the card-making business – combing cards for the textile fiber stranding process that antedated the cotton gin – with one Andrew Adgate (d. 1793); Adgate was also the compiler of the *Philadelphia Harmony* and the pair sold copies of that work in their store. That publication apparently led to his twin sons' training as printers in an unnamed Philadelphia press office, after having graduated from the University of Pennsylvania.

As a result of that training, the Westcott brothers came to know Alexander McKenzie (1773-1822), a bookseller there. When their father's business folded in 1794, the family returned to its Bridgeton roots; his brother James convinced McKenzie to join him there as the senior partner in a printing, bookselling, and stationery concern: McKenzie & Westcott. In October 1795, the pair issued the first newspaper published in Cumberland County: *The Argus and New-Jersey Centinel*, with John Jr. employed as a journeyman there. That partnership arrangement expired on October 1, 1796 when declined to renew it; local histories suggest that Westcott had angered local Federalists who then withdrew their support. Yet those same sources report that the *Argus* continued under the direction of John Westcott Jr. until 1806; but the paper's last known number was issued by McKenzie five weeks after the partnership ended.

Rather the imprint record indicates that Westcott became an itinerant journeyman who occasionally joined brother James in his later venues – though his trail is difficult to track in the ensuing decades. The first of those was in Alexandria; there James joined bookseller John V. Thomas (410) in April 1797 to issue that port town's first daily newspaper, *The Times and Alexandria Advertiser*. However, the Republican views of the journal brought increasing threats from local Federalists, prompting Thomas to withdraw from the venture

in April 1799. Not wanting to let the daily die, James brought his father, John Sr., to Alexandria as his new partner in the retitled *The Times and District of Columbia Advertiser*, and with his brother John Jr. as his foreman. The new family business continued until April 1802, when father John Sr. decided to retire from journalism and focus solely on bookselling, after having experienced two years of scathing attacks from the *Alexandria Advertiser* of Samuel Snowden (393), a Federalist daily established to challenge the Westcotts' venture. That pressure continued as brother James prolonged the business as J. D. Westcott & Co. even reducing to a thrice-weekly schedule that July, until November 1802; then he sold the journal to Republican publishers James Lyon (274) and Richard Dinmore (139). It appears that John Jr. stayed with the press shop until Lyon's departure from the firm of Lyon & Dinmore in early 1804, even as that office crossed the Potomac to Georgetown and then to Washington.

In May 1804, Westcott opened his own newspaper in the family seat of Bridgeton, New Jersey – *The Apollo and Bridgetown Weekly Miscellany*. The venture may have been tied to the campaign waged that summer and fall by brother James for a seat in the state's General Assembly; but when that effort failed, the paper closed at the end of 1804. Local histories report that John Jr. conducted a paper there called *The Minerva* through 1806, though no copies of that title have survived. The reported timing suggests that Westcott continued on alone in Bridgeton, without the assistance of either his father or his brother until the next family press opened in Washington in April 1807.

That subsequent business was a job-printing office that brother James started with Richard Dinmore to print both books and the successor to his *Times*, the *Washington Expositor*. With James increasingly involved in New Jersey politics and real estate, it appears that John Jr. was the office foreman, with Dinmore editing the newspaper; after Dinmore's death in 1811, his father John Sr. had financial responsibilities in the concern, but it seems clear that John Westcott Jr. conducted the office until its closing in 1816, when his father's estate was settled after his 1813 death in Alexandria; through all this, brother James remained in Cumberland even as he was the titular proprietor of the business.

Westcott's whereabouts over the next twenty years is unknown, but as he had resided in Washington in 1816, he likely remained there as an anonymous employee in the capital's myriad of printing offices, as his brother James moved away from printing in New Jersey, eventually becoming the secretary of state there in 1829. But in the mid-1830s he emerged in Florida, once again in a family concern with his brother's sons. The eldest, James D. Westcott, Jr. was a lawyer who was named the secretary of the Florida Territory by Andrew Jackson in 1829, becoming a major early political figure there; he evidently brought his younger brothers (and Westcott's nephews) Richard and John along – with Richard Dinmore Westcott establishing a newspaper in Apalachicola; the sons of James Sr. were followed by their uncle John Westcott Jr. as part of yet another family printing business; so when Florida was admitted to the Union in 1845, the firm so closely associated with one of the state's first U.S. senators, James Jr. was appointed as the state's first public printers, after having done some printing for the territorial government previously.

How long Westcott stayed in Florida is uncertain; nephew Richard removed to Texas after the Mexican War, and uncle John may have gone with him. What is clear is that the aging journeyman was working in the printing offices of Memphis in the summer of 1851, then a center of Southern-advocacy journalism, as had been the family's press in Florida. Westcott died there in July, having survived his twin brother by nearly a decade.

Personal Data

Born: Jan. 25 1775 Bridgeton, New Jersey.

Died: July 1851 Memphis, Tennessee

Apparently died unmarried and without issue, as no family record.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; U.S. Newspaper Directory, Library of Congress; Nelson, *New Jersey Printers*; Cushing, *History of ... Cumberland, New Jersey*; Craig, *Cumberland County Genealogical Data*; genealogical data from various family histories posted on Ancestry.com and USGenWeb.com (May 2013), all from a Westcott family Bible in hands of James Jr.'s descendants.