

446 WILLIAMS, PHILIP

Publisher

Woodstock

Publisher of *The Woodstock Herald* (1817-22) with Benjamin L. Bogan (037).

Williams was a distinctive figure in the Shenandoah Valley; he was the nephew of one county-court clerk and the father of another; the three kinsmen served successively for seventy-eight years as the clerk of Shenandoah County, with Philip for fifty-six of them. In 1817, he used that position to bring a weekly newspaper at the county seat of Woodstock.

Born in 1770, Williams was the third son of William Williams (1722-78) and Lucy Clayton (1730-80) of Culpeper County. Both of his parents died during the Revolutionary War and so he was sent to live in Shenandoah County with the family of his uncle John Williams (1725-99). After the war, Philip's uncle succeeded Thomas Marshall, the father of the future Chief Justice John Marshall, as clerk of the county court there in 1784; John made his young nephew his deputy, so when he retired from the post in 1789, the then nineteen-year-old deputy clerk was elected his successor; it proved to be the only job Williams ever held.

After the War of 1812, Williams became convinced that the county needed a journal-of-record for legal notices and proclamations, as well as a mercantile advertiser that would aid the development of the county seat, Woodstock. That small market town still depended on newspapers in Winchester and Staunton for such, papers that were increasingly challenged by the growth of population and commerce throughout the valley. Williams wanted to provide an alternative in Woodstock for those living in the central valley between those two larger entrepôts; all he needed was a trained printer to produce the journal for him. His search for such a person came to fruition in 1817 when he met a printer from Alexandria named Benjamin Lewis Bogan. A veteran of the War of 1812 from Stafford County with an education from the College of William & Mary, Bogan had established a small job printing office in Alexandria in early 1816; he travelled to Woodstock sometime early in 1817 as part of the clerk's ongoing search for a printer; and what he saw there convinced him to relocate his press to Shenandoah County.

Together, the new firm of Williams & Bogan issued their first weekly *Woodstock Herald* that December. The new weekly was an immediate success, confirming the partners' assessment of its potential viability. Its success is also evinced by Bogan's ability to buy Williams out of the business at the end of the *Herald's* first six months of publication. With issue of July 1, 1818, Bogan became sole proprietor of the weekly, and remained such until June 1823.

While Williams never relinquished his clerkship, his separation from the *Herald* certainly allowed him to return to a less-complicated life. Eventually, he groomed a successor, just as his uncle had, in his son Samuel C. Williams (1812-62) – who also served as a proprietor of Woodstock's weekly in the late 1830s. So when he finally decided to retire in June 1845, after fifty-six years in office, the county court made his youngest son the new Shenandoah County clerk. In his valedictory address to the court, Williams declared that he wanted to enjoy a peaceful retirement before age and infirmity claimed him, but it appears he was already in physical decline – he only lived another nine months. He was buried in the yard of

the Episcopal Church in Woodstock under a stone engraved with a memorial saying that:

"He was the clerk of the county of Shenandoah for fifty-four [sic] years,
and he lived and died without an enemy."

Yet nowhere was it reported, even in print, that Williams had been once been a journalist.

Personal Data

Born: Sept. 5 1770 Culpeper County, Virginia.
Married [1]: Oct. 15 1791 Sarah Croudson @ Woodstock, Virginia (d. 1826).
Married [2]: Nov. 12 1836 Sarah Fry @ Woodstock, Virginia.
Died: Mar. 15 1846 Woodstock Shenandoah County, Virginia.
Children: Lucy Clayton (b. 1793); Elizabeth (b. 1795); Ann Jane (b. 1797); Mary
Susan; Sarah Francis; Philip Jr. (b. 1802); James Clayton (b. 1805);
Samuel Croudson (b. 1811); Eleanor Frances (b. 1815).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Cappon; Wayland, *Shenandoah County*; *Old Clerks of Virginia*; genealogical data
from Williams family charts posted on Ancestry.com (May 2013).