

## 447 WILLIAMS, RICHARD

Printer, Publisher

Charlestown

Printer of the *Patriot* (1802-03) and the *Farmers' Register* (1804) at Charlestown for William Brown (058); then publisher of the *Farmer's Repository* (1808-27), initially with Brown; also employer of John S. Gallaher (177).

Williams was the founder of one of Virginia's longest-lived Jeffersonian newspapers and the mentor to the founder of one of its most influential Whig journals. And when he retired the two papers merged and became a Virginia institution that survived even the Civil War.

Born in Washington County, Maryland, in January 1780, Williams was a life-long resident of the central Potomac River valley. He trained in the Hagerstown – then still officially known as Elizabethtown – office of Stewart Herbert (1754-95), publisher of the town's first weekly, *The Washington Spy*. Contemporaneous accounts describe Williams as being Herbert's first apprentice; if so then he began his training at age ten, when the *Spy* began issuing in 1790. As Herbert died in early 1795, it is likely that Williams was not an independent journeyman by then, so would have continued there under Herbert's widow and successor, Phebe, and then under her new husband, Thomas Grieves (1766-1840), publisher of the new *Maryland Herald and Elizabeth-Town Advertiser*, until he came of age in 1798.

### Journeyman Printer

Nineteenth-century histories of the area all date Williams' move to Charlestown as coming in 1802 and report that he founded the *Farmers' Repository* at that time. As that journal did not issue until 1808, these accounts actually detail his involvement in that paper's laborious development and its link to the partisan journalism seen in the region around 1800.

The Hagerstown press of Herbert and Grieves was a Republican one, evidently a result of the wide-spread resistance there to Federalist-led militia call-ups in 1794 when forces were mustered to suppress the nearby Whiskey Rebellion; this background made Williams a life-long Jeffersonian. Likewise, the Martinsburg press of Nathaniel Willis (449), a transplanted journeyman who had been a part of the Boston Tea Party in 1773, was anti-Federalist in its perspective. In March 1799, Willis was assaulted in his office by two local Federalist leaders for his partisan rhetoric; when that pummeling failed to change the content of his *Potomac Guardian*, local Federalists offered John Alburtis (004), the foreman of the Willis office, the chance to conduct his own paper, the *Berkeley Intelligencer*, with a substantial subsidy from the area's merchants; the effect was a quick decline in Willis's financial affairs, forcing him to sell the *Potomac Guardian* that October and remove to Ohio in 1800. At the same time, Washington County Federalists, just across the Potomac from Berkeley, attempted to create a similar competitor to Grieves's *Maryland Herald* through the office of Johan Gruber (1768-1857), Hagerstown's celebrated German-language printer; unlike Alburtis, Gruber was not so politically malleable and the proposed venture fell through.

In the midst of these Federalist machinations, Williams became part of the Berkeley County network sustaining the remnant of the Jeffersonian *Guardian*. The immediate successor to

Willis was Armstrong Charlton (088); he was a refugee from the silencing of "radical" voices in the British press in the 1790s, which made his editorial views more problematic for many Berkeley County readers than those of Willis had been. In April 1800, he renamed the paper the *Republican Atlas* and took on William Brown (058) as a printer-partner; Brown's brother Matthew (057) was a well-known and controversial Federalist editor in Baltimore, so this business arrangement was likely doomed from the start by the partners' conflicting political views. Sometime in the summer of 1800, Charlton sold his interest to Brown and departed Martinsburg. Brown's subsequent attempt to turn the newspaper into a Federalist one was stymied by the presence of the subsidized *Intelligencer* of Alburtis; so he removed to nearby Charlestown in winter of 1801-02, after closing the *Atlas* that November. In parting with Armstrong, Brown now needed trained help to assist him in conducting his office there, newspaper or not. If the dates reported in accounts from that time are correct, this was the moment that Williams moved to Charlestown, where he served as Brown's foreman.

Jefferson County was split off from Berkeley in early 1801, and Brown's removal to the new county seat made him, by default, printer to the county's courts. As Jefferson also needed a journal-of-record, the new *Charlestown Patriot* soon issued from Brown's press starting in mid- or late-1802. The *Patriot* was the first of two short-lived newspapers whose durations are unknown, masked by the absence of any surviving issues. Yet both the *Patriot* and the succeeding *Farmer's Register* appear to follow a common pattern: the Federalist Brown was engaged to print a Republican paper for unnamed and unknown Charlestown editors. In this setting, Williams evidently made friends among the county's Jeffersonian leaders.

By late 1807, Charlestown was once again without a journal-of-record following the demise of the *Register*. So in the winter of 1807-08, Ferdinando Fairfax (160), the county's largest land-owner and a justice on the county court, launched an effort to start a new weekly, soliciting subscribers for a paper that he would edit: the *Farmers Museum*. Yet he was also the county's most prominent Democratic-Republican leader, meaning that hiring Brown to publish his partisan paper was problematic, as had been the preceding efforts. Negotiations stalled between Fairfax and Brown, until Williams became the way to compromise.

### **Republican Publisher**

In early spring 1808, Fairfax sold his lengthy subscriber list to Williams; the journeyman then forged a one-year pact with his employer to publish the *Farmer's Repository* from Brown's Charlestown press as the firm of Williams & Brown; and Fairfax endorsed the new journal as a properly Jeffersonian one when it issued in April 1808. Brown withdrew from the venture at the end of March 1809 and moved on to Hagerstown; there he began a new, avowedly Federalist weekly – *The Hagers-Town Gazette* – in May 1809; clearly, his plan was to take on Williams in Charlestown, Grieves in Hagerstown, and Matthias Bartgis (024), who then published two Jeffersonian papers in Frederick, Maryland. His project continued for nearly five years with the support once proffered to Gruber, but it did not make him wealthy or influential; he left Hagerstown at the end of 1813 financially broken and ridiculed.

Williams, in contrast, survived and prospered in Charlestown through his adroit handling of his potential readers and knowledge of the region's political sentiments. His new weekly,

unlike its predecessors, was an immediate success, making the *Farmer's Repository* an oft-quoted commentator on political and commercial events. Indeed, there was not an attempt to publish an opposing paper in Jefferson County until 1816, and then that journal – the *American Eagle* – was the first in a succession of short-lived Federalist papers issued from Shepherdstown, and not Charlestown. But by then, Williams was an established and well-respected figure there, having served as a lieutenant during the War of 1812 in Capt. Joseph Grantham's Company of the 55th Regiment of Virginia Militia. That unit was dispatched to defend Norfolk in April 1814, forcing Williams to leave his office and paper in the hands of John S. Gallaher, a printer originally from Jefferson then working in the Baltimore office of Hezekiah Niles, publisher of the *Weekly Register*; he would manage the business until Williams returned in August 1815. Gallaher went on to a long career as a journalist and politician, but he made his first mark politically by publishing a lengthy mock-heroic poem about an uproarious Federalist celebration in nearby Shepherdstown over the abdication of Napoleon that spring: "The Cossack's Celebration." His poem was reprinted in Republican papers elsewhere and then issued as a pamphlet in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, that fall. Yet he was called to militia service in August 1814 as well – to defend Washington during the infamous British invasion – so forcing a month-long suspension of the paper. Still, Gallaher's contributions added to the reputation of the *Farmer's Repository*, despite its proprietor's enforced absence.

Ironically, Gallaher also induced Williams's eventual retirement. After the war, the founder picked up his labors where he had left off, and so continued to prosper. But over the course of the 1820s, competition increased dramatically in the region, with multiple newspapers emerging in Winchester, Martinsburg, Frederick, and Hagerstown, as well as new nationally-distributed papers such as Washington's *National Intelligencer*. Williams found competition within the county as well in the series of Federalist papers from Shepherdstown, as well as two papers now published by Gallaher at Harper's Ferry. The protégé now exceeded his mentor having started a weekly *Free Press* in June 1821 and the first successful female-oriented paper in Virginia – *The Lady's Garland* – in February 1824. So by late 1826, Williams was looking for a way out before the competition undermined his financial security. When he first began looking for a successor, Gallaher had offered his Harper's Ferry paper for sale in order to finance the acquisition of Williams's more established one. But the two men soon realized that by merging the two papers, instead of selling either one, Gallaher could forge a powerful new Republican voice in the northern valley, one that could better oppose the candidacy of Andrew Jackson in the coming 1828 election. So in early 1827, Williams came to an agreement with Gallaher to merge their weekly papers into one; the new *Virginia Free Press & Farmers' Repository* made its first appearance in March 1827, issued from Williams's Charlestown office; it continued in the Gallaher family's hands until 1883.

### **Retirement**

Williams now moved into a life as a gentleman farmer, though he likely retained an interest in Gallaher's paper for some time as either a silent partner or a creditor. Sometime after 1830, he acquired a farm in the Middleway district immediately west of Charlestown and bought a few slaves to operate it. From the scale of the operation, it appears that Williams

was producing foodstuffs for local markets, as the farm was valued at just \$7500 in 1840.

Yet by 1850, when he was seventy, Williams had returned to a house in Charlestown, living with his wife Ann alone, having married off his daughters and sold off his slaves. His death three years later was widely reported in the country, all noting that he was "an old and prominent citizen" of his adopted town. Those notices also reported that he had founded the *Farmer's Repository* in 1802, indicating just how fully his newspaper's longevity and reputation had forced into the shadows the actual context of its founding.

### ***Personal Data***

Born: Jan. 29 1780 Washington County, Maryland.  
Married: ca. 1804 Ann @ Washington County, Maryland.  
Died: Apr. 5 1852 Charlestown, Virginia/West Virginia.  
Children: Census data suggest 2 sons and 3 daughters born between 1805 & 1825; one daughter married a son of John S. Gallaher.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Norona & Shetler; Rice, "West Virginia Printers;" U.S. Newspaper Directory, Library of Congress; Scharf, *Western Maryland*; Williams, *Washington County*; Bushong, *Jefferson County*; Musser, *Shepherdstown*; Federal Decennial Census, 1810-50.