

453 WINTER, JOHN

Printer

Alexandria

Printer in Alexandria (1806-21) who attempted the *Alexandria Weekly Messenger* in 1819.

Winter was a practical printer who was broken financially by the newspapers he published in Maryland before 1802. His ensuing employment in Alexandria as a journeyman did little to alleviate that situation, so relegating to obscurity a figure well-known in the 1790s.

In January 1819, the then sixty-year-old Winter proposed publishing a new and remarkably inexpensive weekly in Alexandria, a town that supported two daily papers that winter. His prospectus for the journal portrayed a tradesman both destitute and desperate:

"Grown old and infirm in the duties of his profession, he feels himself under the necessity of attempting something toward the support of his family, which he has not been able, hitherto to effect by the small stipend that he has been accustomed to receive. He finds no small portion of his hopes of success, therefore, on the fact, that, though the merits of his paper may not prove equivalent to the small pecuniary cost of it, yet an ample remuneration may be found in the consideration of having relieved a young and helpless family. But he is not without hope, that the work itself will prove to be not altogether unworthy of public patronage."

Winter hoped to find support in Alexandria, Georgetown, Washington, Baltimore, Leesburg, and Frederick, locales that supported his prior publishing efforts. But he was disappointed in his expectations, dying in poverty just two years later, leaving a much younger wife with four children under fifteen to fend for themselves.

He had started his career as a journalist in early 1790, opening the *Maryland Gazette and Frederick Weekly Advertiser* in that western Maryland town that February. Born in "one of the lower counties of Maryland," it appears that Winter had trained in Baltimore before his arrival in Frederick, though he may also have had Philadelphia connections, as his first wife's obituary was published in several papers there just two months after Winter began his *Maryland Gazette*. His weekly benefitted from its start by the late 1789 closings of the two established papers there of Matthias Bartgis (024), one in German (*Marylandische Zeitung*) and one in English (*Maryland Chronicle*), as that bilingual entrepreneur reorganized his finances. Winter's paper continued into October 1791 before passing from the scene.

Bartgis evidently had a hand in Winter's affairs in this initial period. The timing of the start of his *Gazette* suggests that, after closing his papers, Bartgis had sold his Frederick office to Winter in order for him to produce his new paper, and so had retained a financial interest (as a note) in his successor's earnings. And the timing of the paper's ending implies a falling-out between the two printers, as Bartgis issued a new English-language weekly in Frederick in May 1792 with a name identical to its predecessor, only with his surname added to the title – *Bartgis's Maryland Gazette and Frederick Weekly Advertiser* – indicating he was in possession of both Winter's press and subscription list. Moreover, Bartgis printed a sharp comment in his *Gazette* in August 1793 warning readers to "Beware of Liars!" – meaning Winter, who had issued a pamphlet in Baltimore that purported to be from "his" Frederick

press, when the Bartgis office was the only press operating in the town and the publisher owned the tools formerly used by Winter. That piece evinces Winter's removal to Baltimore about the end of 1791 and his ensuing employment as a journeyman there.

In early 1794, Winter returned to Frederick to publish another weekly as competition for the now-estranged Bartgis. By then, the partisan split between Federalists and Republicans had taken root in American journalism, with Bartgis and his *Maryland Gazette* following the Jeffersonian path. Winter would publish a paper that favored the incumbent administration, though not necessarily the policies of Alexander Hamilton; Winter is invariably described as "a Washingtonian Federalist of the old school," so not a follower of Northern leaders such as Hamilton and Adams. Yet the choice of a title for his new weekly embraced the trope of many Federalist editors who appropriated Republican terms and reread them from their political perspective; here Winter chose the title of the controversial 1792 tome of Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, and set out to recast such rights according to American principles, and not French ones, issuing his new paper on January 22, 1794. In a decidedly satirical response, Bartgis quickly renamed his paper as the *Federal Gazette*. The two journals faced off against each other for the next six years there.

It is clear, however, that White conducted the *Rights of Man* on a very tight budget. Almost immediately, he advertised for a partner who could assume some of the financial burden, as well as assist him in the weekly's production. In March, he took on John D. Cary in that role, though their partnership seems to have been a single year contract, as Cary joined the firm conducting the *Washington Spy* in Hagerstown in March 1795. Winter was dependent on his son John Jr. as an office assistant and delivery carrier, though that potential successor died before 1795, when a second John Jr. (454) was born to Winter's second wife. He also subsidized his income by teaching school in Bentztown, a village just north of Frederick. Moreover, he reduced the paper's physical size over time, so shrinking his expenses.

But even as Winter persevered, in the end he did not control his fate. In early 1798, Cary returned to Frederick and set up a competing literary journal with Federalist sympathies, *The Key*, printed for him by Bartgis. Few issues of it survive, all from 1798, leading modern bibliographers to report its end that summer; but nineteenth-century histories report it continued until 1800; if so then Cary was undermining local support for Winter with the aid of the Republican press there. Then in January 1799, his office burned, leading to pleas in various papers in the central Potomac River Valley asking that his subscribers pay their arrearages as quickly as possible so that Winter could rebuild his business. He likely found sufficient response to continue for a time, but by late 1800, his creditors were hounding him. It appears that the *Rights of Man* closed its run in December 1800 with Winter then signing over his office's equipment to his landlord for overdue rent the following May.

Yet Winter remained in Frederick, attempting to resurrect his newspaper while conducting a job-printing concern, probably leasing his old press. But in March 1802, his tenuous position was undone by another Federalist printer, one John P. Thomson of nearby Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. When he began circulating subscription papers for a new *Frederick Town Herald*, Winter immediately circulated a handbill pleading with the citizens of Frederick County to reject Thompson's overtures. Identifying himself as the "Editor of the *Frederick*

Town Federalist," he believed that

"If the services of an old and faithful servant can lay any claim to your friendship, they would request you to pay NO ATTENTION to the solicitation of a man, whose conduct in attempting 'to take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned,' will not admit of excuse, even, if it came from one of riper years. ... I have not the affected modesty to believe that Mr. Thompson, or any other man of his profession and EXPERIENCE, can claim a preference to JOHN WINTER."

However, the appeal fell on deaf ears. Thompson's *Federalist* issued its first number on June 19, 1802 and continued for thirty years. Winter was soon forced to find work elsewhere.

Where that locale was over the next four years is uncertain, though it seems reasonable to suggest that Winter returned to journeyman work in Baltimore as he had in 1792. The next place where he left a record is in Alexandria, where he appears in the city census from 1806 onward. Enumerated simply as "printer" in those lists, Winter must have worked for others there, as he did not advertise a job-printing office there, as did such firms in the town then. That made him one of the numerous, though anonymous printers who transited the capital district in those years. As the aforementioned 1819 prospectus appeared only in the pages of the *Alexandria Gazette* of Samuel Snowden (393), it is likely that he worked for Snowden then and, perhaps, right from his arrival in the river-port in 1806, given Snowden's known connections to Baltimore's presses and papers.

That prospectus is also the last surviving glimpse of Winter in his lifetime. His name does not appear in the city's newspapers again until the notices of his death were published in April 1821. Nor were any notices published concerning the administration of his estate, clear evidence that Winter died intestate and without the scale of assets that would require the appointment of an executor by the county court. It was an ignominious end to a life of struggle in support of conservative politicians that abandoned him in his time of need.

Personal Data

Born:	ca.	1759	Southern Maryland.
Married [1]:	before	1790	Wife Mary died @ Frederick, Md. in April 1790
Married [2]:	ca.	1795	Unnamed, born about 1780.
Died:	Apr. 2	1821	Alexandria, Virginia.
Children:	By Mary:	at least one son, John Jr. d. by 1795.	
	By second wife:	at least 2 sons & 2 daughters; son John Jr. d. 1818.	

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Minick, *Printing in Maryland*; Scharf, *Western Maryland* [sole source of later descriptions]; Federal Decennial Census, 1820; notices in Alexandria newspapers (1790-1821); prospectus in *Alexandria Gazette*, Jan. 11, 1819.