

**463 YANCEY, F. G. — [FRANCIS GARLAND YANCEY]**

**Printer, Publisher**

**Petersburg**

Publisher of *Petersburg Intelligencer* (1814-33), initially with Thomas Whitworth (443); of *Petersburg Daily Courier* (1814) with John Wood (456); and of *The Times* (1828-29) there.

Yancey was a practical printer who rose to the ownership of the Petersburg press office where he had trained. His ascension continued the succession of master-to-journeyman transfers that saw just three proprietors of that newspaper office over its first fifty years.

Born in 1794, Yancey was a fourth generation descendant of the family's progenitor, Charles Yancey, who was a major planter in late seventeenth-century Hanover County. He was the youngest son of Tyree Yancey (1755-94), a Louisa County carpenter and farmer, and Sarah Jennings (1759-1835) of Amelia County; his family moved from Louisa to Hanover in about 1787, taking up residence on land there left to his mother by her father Robert Jennings. By 1810, Yancey was serving an apprenticeship in the *Petersburg Intelligencer* office of John Dickson (134), the town's Federalist publisher. Yet despite his master's political inclinations, the young printer also served twice in the Virginia Militia during the War of 1812, first with the 1st Regiment in 1812 and then with the 39th Regiment in 1813.

However, Yancey did not serve in the large-scale mobilizations attending the British military expedition in the Chesapeake in the summer of 1814. He was immersed at that time in the succession crisis caused by Dickson's death. In mid-1811, the publisher's ill-health led to his withdrawal from the town's public life, where he had been a prominent actor before. Then in June 1813, he placed an advertisement in Washington's *National Intelligencer* offering his office for sale; it ran for several weeks. The reason, he said, was his "long and continued ill-health" which now forced him "to relinquish my present pursuits." It was an inopportune time to be selling a Federalist paper, given the ongoing war with Britain that that most (if not all) such journals opposed. He evidently received no serious offers at that time, as the *Petersburg Intelligencer* was still issued under his name when he died in July 1814. Dickson's wife, Anna, was named administrator of his estate, selling his business and chattel property (a slave, a horse, and "cows") in an auction barely six weeks after his death.

Thomas Whitworth, a young English immigrant with an entrepreneurial bent, was inclined to buy the *Intelligencer*; he was in agreement with the campaign Dickson had mounted for encouraging local industrial development, and recognized the *Intelligencer's* key role in that campaign. But not being a printer, Whitworth set out to forge a partnership with Yancey, now foreman in Dickson's shop and so conversant in the paper's production. Unfortunately, Yancey had committed to another journalistic endeavor shortly before Dickson's death; John Wood, president of the Petersburg Academy and the Federalist editor who had helped reveal the Aaron Burr Conspiracy in 1806, had convinced Yancey to be his printer-partner in publishing Petersburg's first daily newspaper: the *Daily Courier*. But that paper had not yet issued, still lacking sufficient subscriptions, when Dickson's estate was auctioned.

The two options proved a dilemma for Yancey. The prospects for the proven *Intelligencer* in the hands of Whitworth were clearly better than those for the unproven *Courier* in Wood's hands, especially given his often erratic behavior. So the printer chose a middle course: he would act as the tradesman-partner in both papers, at least until Wood could find a new partner. So on August 30th, the firm of Whitworth & Yancey issued its first number of the *Petersburg Intelligencer*; while on September 21st, the firm of Wood & Yancey issued the first number of the *Daily Courier*. The twenty-year-old printer appears to have handled the difficult production with skill, though the appearance of a new daily there evidently strained the available supplies of paper; Whitworth & Yancey apologized for the irregular size of their *Intelligencer* on September 30th, assuring their readers that it would "in future appear in its regular and proper form." But from the start of his *Daily Courier*, Wood was under pressure to find a suitable partner to replace Yancey while still conducting classes at the Academy. The stress quickly affected his health; he posted a notice in the *Courier* on November 1st announcing that he had taken on substitute teachers to finish his fall-term courses so that he could recover from "the unhappy state of my health for several months past." Shortly after that notice, Wood convinced one John Netherland (312), probably a merchant-planter from nearby Powhatan County, to purchase Yancey's interest in the *Courier*, thereby allowing him to return to the *Intelligencer* full-time, as promised.

Despite the problems when they assumed control of the *Intelligencer*, Whitworth & Yancey conducted the long-lived mercantile advertiser profitably for the next five years. That result was not foreordained, especially given the destruction of their business and Yancey's home in the Great Petersburg Fire of July 1815. But their large subscriber base and advertising patronage allowed the partners to quickly rebuild the business, despite the presence of the competing *Petersburg Republican* of Edward Pescud (324), the town's some-time mayor. Yet Whitworth had other goals in life beyond the print trade, primarily in building mills on the Appomattox and profiting from their products. So in September 1819, Whitworth sold his interest in the *Intelligencer* to Yancey and retired from journalism. And by the 1830s, he was directing the grist and cotton mills of the Providence Manufacturing Company, later the Matoaca Manufacturing Company, along the northern bank of the river.

In contrast, Yancey continued in journalism until his death in 1833. He retained full control over the *Intelligencer* until 1825, when he added William Rose (364) as editor. Then in June 1828, Yancey sold a controlling interest in his twice-weekly paper to Dr. Richard Field and Thomas L. Wilson in order to organize a new literary weekly with Henry Whyte. They issued the first number of *The Times* on October 6, 1828 and continued it until October 9, 1829, when Whyte withdrew from the venture. Yancey then used his financial interest in both journals to merger the two, with the *Times* becoming a weekly edition "for the country" of the twice weekly *Intelligencer*, with Wilson as his new partner. Such was the state of affairs when Yancey died in July 1833. The obituary that Wilson then published in the *Intelligencer* indicated that Yancey had been "in bad health for some years, but for the last six months he appeared to be regaining his former vigor;" yet on the morning of July 5th, he was "prostrated by an attack of apoplexy and paralysis" after having participated in the celebrations of the day before; Yancey lingered, reportedly in agony, for two days before

finally succumbing to the inevitable.

In his years at the head of the *Intelligencer* office, Yancey was a unique figure. An ardent Whig in his later years, he was at the forefront of introducing modernized business practices to the city's printing trade, which allowed him to easily survive the economic downturn of 1819-20. Yet he was also a leader of efforts to provide relief for destitute artisan families there, whether from the debilitating illness of the head of the household or an unexpected death that left surviving families without a provider. In 1817, he helped form the Petersburg Benevolent Mechanics Association (PBMA) and was elected the society's first president. That effort made Yancey a noteworthy employer, as well as an oft-cited voice in modern-day histories of Petersburg's antebellum industrialization, but his continuation of traditional trade practices of lodging his journeymen (four such workers in 1820), rather than expecting employees to find housing on their own, made the printer a legend among contemporaries. Thus when Yancey died, his peers in the PMBA voted to erect a monument on his grave and entered a memorial to their former leader in their records, noting that he was:

"As an individual, kind, courteous, and intelligent; as a magistrate, his course by a fairness of intention above all disguise; as an editor, perfectly free from those selfish and unworthy purposes which too often find their nourishment in the conflicts of duty."

After Yancey's death, his widow removed to Chesterfield County with her four daughters, receiving a quarterly stipend from the PBMA through the 1850s, as well having the cost of the funeral of daughter Louisa covered by Yancey's colleagues in 1857. Shortly after the marriage that same year of her youngest daughter, Clara, she joined her in her new Henry County home and then on to Halifax as the Civil War raged in the east. All of Yancey's family thus died far from his Petersburg resting place in Blandford Cemetery.

### ***Personal Data***

Born: April 6 1794 Hanover County, Virginia.  
Married: Dec. 30 1815 Harriet Stone @ Petersburg, Virginia.  
Died: July 7 1833 Petersburg, Virginia.  
Children: Julia O. (b. 1816); Louisa (b. 1829); Mary Carrington (b. 1831); Clara F. (b. 1833).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Cappon; Seagrave, *Artisans & Mechanics*; Wyatt, *Petersburg's Story*; Barnes *Artisan Workers in the Upper South*; notices in *Petersburg Intelligencer* (1814-33), *Daily Courier* (1814), *Richmond Enquirer* (1814-33), and [Norfolk] *American Beacon* (1814-28); genealogical data from Yancey family charts posted online ([yanceyfamilygenealogy.org](http://yanceyfamilygenealogy.org)).