

467 BAGNALL, JAMES

Printer

Richmond

Apprentice and journeyman printer in the office of William A. Rind (359), his brother-in-law, both in Richmond (1798-1800) and the District of Columbia (1800-1804).

Bagnall had only a brief association with the Virginia printing trade in his formative years, but it was one which shaped his working and political life. He was a son of Loyalist refugees who arrived at Shelburne, Nova Scotia, with the British evacuation of New York in 1783; his father, Samuel Bagnall, was a carpenter and/or cabinet-maker from Philadelphia, while his mother, Elizabeth Whitehouse, was apparently a daughter of a soldier in a Loyalist regiment from New York; after the son was born at Shelburne, the family became part of a migration of Loyalist refugees to the Island of St. John – once called Île St-Jean, today Prince Edward Island – in maritime Canada. When promised grants of farm land were not honored by the island's proprietors, the family took up residence in Charlottetown, the provincial capital, where father Samuel resumed his woodworking trade.

In Charlottetown, the Bagnall clan came into contact with a Virginia printer named William Alexander Rind. The eldest child of the Williamsburg printers William (358) and Clementina (356) Rind, he left Virginia sometime after the 1785 dissolution of the Richmond partnership of Thomas Nicolson (315) and William Prentis (340), who had trained him, and was working as a journeyman in the Charlottetown office of James Robertson, Sr. (1747-1816) by 1788. Robertson was a Loyalist as well, a Scottish immigrant who had conducted papers in Albany, Norwich (Conn.), New York City, Philadelphia, and Charleston, before joining the evacuation to Shelburne in 1783; after briefly conducting a press at Halifax, he moved on to the Island of St. John in 1787 to become "the King's printer" for then Governor Edmund Fanning; after setting up shop there, Robertson induced Rind to join him. It proved a momentous decision for Rind; Robertson left his small office in Rind's care in the spring of 1789 in order to make a "business trip" to England and never returned; Rind was named "the King's printer" in his own right the following year – an ironic twist for the son of parents who had each served as "printer to the colony and dominion of Virginia" by its revolutionary leaders.

With his press now firmly established there, Rind married in August 1790, taking as his wife Elizabeth Bagnall (1770-1843), eldest of Samuel & Elizabeth Bagnall's children. The marriage brought Rind the assistance of his wife's younger brother James as an apprentice. Yet the ensuing years were financially trying for Rind, especially as his family grew to include four young children by 1797. So in the summer of 1798, he moved family and press to Richmond, taking with him his fifteen-year-old apprentice and brother-in-law, James Bagnall.

Once in Richmond, Bagnall was immediately exposed to the intense political conflict over the Alien & Sedition Acts and the ensuing presidential contest between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson – an environment which shaped his life as an independent journalist later on. Rind's return to Virginia was evidently part of a plan to produce a new Federalist journal in Richmond to more effectively oppose the Republican *Examiner* of Meriwether Jones (242) than did the staid and aging *Virginia Gazette* of Augustine Davis (119); backed by a handful of influential merchant-planters and edited by the incumbent Clerk of the House of

Delegates, John Stewart (401), the proposed paper was also intended to counter several new Republican journals started elsewhere in Virginia in 1799 and 1800, ones under the tutelage of James Lyon (274), son of the notorious Vermont congressman Matthew Lyon. In May 1799, Rind & Stewart began publishing the *Virginia Federalist*, and promptly engaged in editorial combat with Jefferson and his supporters. But Rind & Stewart soon found that their efforts were thwarted by the larger number of Republican writers available to their competitors. Moreover, those writers often questioned the loyalty of both Rind and Bagnall, citing the master's recent employment as "the King's printer" on the Island of St. John, as well as the well-known Loyalist parentage of his apprentice and his wife. By August 1800, once it became clear that Jefferson would prevail over Adams in that fall's election, Rind & Stewart were faced with the reality that their journal had become an unviable venture in Richmond; but rather than close the paper, the partners chose to relocate it, and so claim a place on the larger national stage in doing so. They suspended publication of their fifteen-month-old weekly and moved their press to the District of Columbia. On September 25th, the *Washington Federalist* issued from their new Georgetown location, with New Englander Charles Prentiss (341) prominently reported as its new editor. And as he had before, Bagnall relocated with brother-in-law Rind, continuing to help in printing the *Federalist* there.

Moving to the national capital proved a successful tactic. By early 1802, Rind could consider expanding and reorganizing his press office, a course that involved both an addition (buying a competing paper and merging it into the *Federalist*) and a subtraction (buying Prentiss's interest). Yet the transactions significantly increased the debt encumbering the new firm of William A. Rind & Company – a title suggesting that Bagnall had acquired an interest in the business – which then became a long-term issue. The merger did not generate the revenue that Rind needed to pay the notes he had signed to effect these changes, leading to debt litigation in 1803, and then to a restructuring to bring in new financing; when that overhaul failed to cover his debts, Rind's creditors obtained a court order to force a sale of all of his salable property at a public auction in July 1804; in that sale Rind lost his three presses, his printing supplies, and all of his furniture – office, household, and kitchen. Remarkably, the sale of his tools did not destroy Rind's *Federalist*, as one would expect; rather, he went on to publish the paper by employing job-presses in the District until 1808.

Bagnall evidently benefitted from his brother-in-law's financial distress. He appears to have bought one of Rind's auctioned presses, for in the fall of 1804 he returned to Charlottetown with an entire printing office in his possession, so establishing himself there as a tradesman now independent of his long-time master. That December, Governor Fanning named him as "the King's printer," a position vacant since Rind's 1798 departure; a month later, he began publishing his first newspaper, the *Royal Herald*, filling another void created by Rind's exit.

Yet Bagnall's position as the official government printer did not ensure financial success. His tenure was one marked by multiple unsuccessful attempts at political journalism in support of a reform movement seeking to democratize the aristocratic colonial government of this isolated island-province, as well as recurring efforts to shape that process by service in the provincial assembly. However, the political and trade skills learned under his brother-in-law proved ineffective in a place with a population that was only roughly equivalent to that of Richmond proper without its surrounding hinterland. Moreover, he inadvertently created a

journalistic competitor in his nephew, James Douglas Haszard (1797-1875), by depending on familial labor to operate his printing office, just as Rind had there.

The *Royal Herald* survived just a year, with Bagnall closing his unprofitable weekly shortly before running for (and election to) the 1806 Assembly. Once there, he forged an alliance with one James Bardin Palmer, an immigrant Irish lawyer who was the driving force behind the "Loyal Electors," a group of pro-democratic reformers on the island; Bagnall's press thus became the reformers' voice, although he was only able to financially sustain three short-lived journals supporting the reform program: the *Weekly Recorder of Prince Edward Island* (1810-13), the *Prince Edward Island Gazette* (irregularly 1814-22), and the *Royal Gazette & Prince Edward Island Recorder* (irregularly 1826-27). At the same time, Bagnall struggled to produce imprints required by the provincial government, hampered by that government's unwillingness to pay for the materials that he needed to print them and to compensate him fully for his work. In late 1808, Bagnall tried to resolve his financial problems by expanding his business beyond Prince Edward Island; he left his Charlottetown office in the hands of his brother Samuel (1771-1865) and his nephew/apprentice James Douglas Haszard, and moved to Halifax; there Bagnall began publishing a new weekly that he evidently expected would infuse cash into his problematic business; the *Novator and Nova Scotia Literary Gazette* lasted just eighteen months before he returned to Charlottetown to again take up the cause of the Loyal Electors via a new *Weekly Recorder*.

From 1810 onward, Bagnall faced growing opposition from a series of new royal governors, first one who deprived him of his official salary (1814), and then another who maneuvered for his removal from office as Clerk of the Assembly (1825), both as a result of his support of the Loyal Electors and his financially-delayed printing. When his patron Palmer was expelled from the Assembly in March 1828 by a faction loyal to the newest governor, Bagnall found some financing for a new political weekly in support of the cause of the exiled attorney. However, that effort – *The Phenix* – soon foundered in the face of well-funded competition from his nephew, J. D. Haszard. The young printer was supported by both the faction that displaced his uncle and the new governor, particularly through their backing of Haszard's weekly *Prince Edward Island Register*; that paper was started in 1823, following the demise of Bagnall's *Prince Edward Island Gazette*. Haszard's journal thus became the newspaper of record there by default. In 1830, he was named "the Queen's printer," finally supplanting his mentor and uncle in title, as well as in fact.

The success of Haszard's *Gazette* (known as the *Royal Gazette* after his 1830 appointment) doomed Bagnall's printing business as much as did his political activity. With the death of the *Phenix* in the summer of 1828, the now forty-five-year-old printer retired from the print trade, closing his Charlottetown office and devoting his energies to a leased farm north of town. He remained civically active, openly advocating for the political rights of the island's tenant farmers, of which he was now one; he ran again for the Assembly in 1838, but was defeated by a younger candidate. Sometime after 1848, he moved to a farm leased by his son Samuel and daughter Caroline (with her husband) in Central Bedeque on the island's western end. Bagnall died there, among his family, in June 1855, a passing that evidently was not reported by any newspaper outside of maritime Canada.

Personal Data

Born: Nov. 1783 Shelburne, Nova Scotia, Canada
Married: Aug. 22 1815 Ann Matilda Gardiner @ Charlottetown, P.E.I.
Died: June 20 1855 Central Bedeque, Prince Edward Island, Canada
Children: James Douglas; George; Caroline Charlotte Augusta (1818-1903);
Samuel James (1820-1902); Ann Matilda (b. 1822); Emma Elizabeth
(1824-1914); Sophia Sarah (b. 1828).

Sources: Hubbard on Richmond; *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*; *History of the Book in Canada*; Tremaine, *Bibliography of Canadian Imprints*; *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire*.