

468 BEACH, SAMUEL B. — [SAMUEL BELLAMY BEACH]

Editor, Publisher

Richmond

Editor and publisher of *Virginia Patriot* at Richmond (1810-11) with Augustine Davis (119).

Beach had only a brief association with the Virginia printing trade as part of a life that saw him adopting multiple occupations in a variety of locales, choices which led a contemporary to describe him as being someone who "did everything by turns, and nothing long."

Born near Meriden, Connecticut, Beach was the son of Anne Bellamy and Ashbel Beach, both descendants of seventeenth-century settlers there, and was baptized on the last day of 1786 in that town's church; many genealogical sources report his birth being in 1783 or 1784, but the baptismal date indicates it came late in 1786, as does the age reported in his obituaries. Early in life, his family relocated to central New York state, establishing a farm in the village of Whitestown in what is today Oneida County; as a result, the county towns of upstate New York became life-long refuges for the peripatetic Beach. In the fall of 1802, he entered Yale College as a sophomore and graduated in the spring of 1805, presenting the salutatory oration at his commencement.

As was the case with many Northern college graduates then, Beach's first employment after graduating was as a private tutor in the South. His employer was a Federalist congressman from Maryland's Eastern Shore, Charles Goldsborough (1765-1834); a widower, the future Maryland governor had recently remarried, a marriage that would eventually yield fifteen children; it seems Beach was hired to attend to the educational needs of Goldsborough's two adolescent daughters (by his first wife) at his Shoal Creek estate in Dorchester County, as his second family grew and as he attended to political affairs in both Washington and Annapolis. This Maryland post brought Beach into Federalist political circles in the state; as a result, he was offered an alternate outlet for his classical education and literary skills as editor of a new Federalist journal, once he had completed his contract with Goldsborough.

Before taking up that position though, Beach travelled to his parents' farm at New Hartford in Oneida County, in late 1807 or early 1808, while his patrons solicited subscribers for the proposed weekly. In New York, he wrote (and likely published) his first known, avowedly-political verse: a poem addressed to the retiring Jefferson which satirized the Virginian's accomplishments as president; it was a piece that drew on a sarcastic comment in Horace's *Odes* (Book II) about "a great pillar of prosperity" (*Grande decus columenque rerum*), in clear reference to the Embargo Act of 1807 and its effect on merchants and financiers.

Still, it was not until March 1809, that the new journalistic project finally came to fruition. The first number of *The People's Monitor* was issued on March 4th (Inauguration Day) at Easton, Maryland, overtly announcing Beach's intent to monitor the conduct of the newly-installed Madison administration. The appearance of his paper filled a Federalist void on the Eastern Shore; the first newspaper in Easton was published in 1790 by James Cowan as the *Maryland Herald*; he was forced to close that weekly in late 1804, after five difficult years of competition from the *Republican Star or Eastern Shore Political Luminary* of Thomas Perrin Smith (1776-1832), formerly of Virginia; as it then took another five years to install Beach at

the head of a new Federalist paper, the delay evinces the waning hold of Goldsborough and his partisan supporters on the Eastern Shore electorate. Hence, it is not surprising that the few surviving issues of the *Monitor* suggest that Beach joined the project under a simple one-year contract with his patrons, even as his name appeared in the journal as that of the weekly's owner & editor; that suggestion is supported by the fact that his ensuing editorial employment began in early April 1810. Yet Beach's conduct of the *Monitor* in that one year brought an invitation to conduct a more prominent Federalist journal in Richmond.

The *Virginia Patriot* of Augustine Davis was founded in 1786 as the *Virginia Independent Chronicle*; it became the semi-official voice of the state government as the *Virginia Gazette, and General Advertiser* during his tenure as public printer (1791-98); but his removal from office in November 1798 by a Republican majority in the General Assembly set off a partisan journalistic war in Richmond; the new public printer, Meriwether Jones (242), issued a new political journal, *The Examiner*, in support of the Republican administration, while the now-deposed Clerk of the Assembly, John Stewart (401), started publishing a strident opposition one, *The Virginia Federalist*. As a result, the *Gazette* began to fade into political irrelevance, even though it was still a profitable advertising sheet. So beginning in 1802, Davis tried to energize his aging paper by engaging a series of Federalist writers from beyond Virginia as the paper's editors. First, he gave refuge to John Wood (456), who had fled New York City after defaming Federalist John Adams in 1801 and Republican Aaron Burr in early 1802; Wood was succeeded as editor in 1805 by Charles Prentiss (341), a zealous Federalist writer from Massachusetts; his parting a year later left Davis where he had started in 1802. The election of Madison as president instigated a second round of such editorial partnerships; in December 1808, Davis engaged another Federalist from Massachusetts, Samuel Livermore (267), lately the editor of Baltimore's notorious *Federal Republican*, as his new partner; together they re-launched the *Gazette* under the name of the *Virginia Patriot*.

When Livermore decided to return to Baltimore in early 1810, both Davis and his Federalist patrons deemed Beach a talented, appropriate, and available successor. In the first issue of the *Virginia Patriot* in April 1810, Livermore announced the sale of his interest in the paper to Beach; in turn, he issued a brief statement eschewing any need for formulaic statements of principle, noting simply that he was "an American by birth, a Federalist from principle and conviction, and not entirely inexperienced" as an editor. The similar backgrounds of the successive editors for Davis's journal promptly brought a biting commentary from Thomas Ritchie (360) in his Republican journal, the *Enquirer*:

"A Virginia Patriot, is one who has been in Virginia but once, perhaps, in his life— whose very air is that of a foreigner; who is ignorant of our laws and manners; and, who comes as the missionary of truth, to convince us how much we have been mistaken, all this time, in our politics and rights."

Just how long Beach edited the *Virginia Patriot* is unclear, though his Richmond contract most likely duplicated his year-long experience in Easton; Davis did not print any notices of changes in his partnership agreements until 1817, when he took on his son George (122) as a partner. By then, Beach had long moved on to other ventures in upstate New York.

What is clear is that by late 1812 Beach had settled in Oswego, New York – then a village

adjacent to Fort Ontario at the mouth of the Oswego River – after an indeterminate stay in New York City. The move proved a pivotal one in his long life, particularly in transforming the Federalist editor into a Democratic functionary. Initially, Beach established himself as an apothecary in partnership with physician Benjamin Coe; but that business was destroyed during the War of 1812 when the British sacked the town in May 1814; that event reshaped his view of Great Britain and those who supported her in the war. Beach also married there, taking three wives in just under three years, so experiencing excruciating personal losses on top of his financial ones. After the war, Beach took up the practice of law, being admitted to the New York bar in August 1817; the following spring, he was among the town officials chosen at Oswego's first official town meeting, elected as both a school commissioner and a commissioner of gospel lots (i.e. responsible for seized Anglican church properties). In July 1819, Beach published a pamphlet urging the New York legislature to end the "Great Canal" then under construction at the Oswego River, so enhancing the commerce of his new home; that the project came to be known as the Erie Canal evinces the failure of his arguments; instead, he and his neighbors were compelled to accept a small grant of funds to improve navigation on the river. Despite his increasing civic prominence, Beach's financial problems continued to deteriorate, leading to a declaration of bankruptcy in September 1819. His law practice appears to have resolved that insolvency, as Beach was able to post the requisite security as District Attorney when named such for Oswego County in February 1821.

Over the rest of the 1820s, Beach manifests considerable restlessness. In May 1822, he was appointed as the postmaster of Mount Clemens, Michigan, a village in Macomb County on the western shore of Lake St. Clair above Detroit. Yet he relinquished that appointment just one year later and returned to New York, but to the family homestead in southern Oneida County, and not to his old residence in Oswego. On his return, Beach published his largest single literary work – *Escalala, An American Tale* – from the Utica press of William Williams; the epic poem concerned a fictional colony of Norsemen at the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, a fantasy derived from stories about lost Viking explorers; Beach had sought subscribers for its publication over the preceding three years, after writing an initial draft before he left Oswego; he had not marshaled the necessary funds until his return to New Hartford from Michigan, despite publicizing the proposed publication nation-wide, and so employed Williams, a childhood friend from Whitestown, to finish the delayed project.

In 1826, Beach opened a new law office in nearby Cooperstown, the seat of Otsego County. Sometime in the following year, he joined a statewide effort to effect the reelection of President John Quincy Adams in 1828, agreeing to edit a campaign newspaper in Albany in support of that effort, and moving to the state capital temporarily for that purpose; the resulting *Albany Morning Chronicle* was issued daily (except Sundays) from January 19th until early December by the firm of Beach, Denio & Richards (with bookseller John Denio and printer Seth Richards as his business partners). After Adams lost to Jackson, Beach returned to his New Hartford residence and his Cooperstown legal practice.

Beach completed his shift to Democratic circles in the 1830s, becoming part of Martin Van Buren's political network. While remaining interested in political journalism, he never again found a suitable situation. In July 1831, Beach advertised his availability as a political editor in several nationally-circulated papers, without any known success. However, the death of

his third wife in 1832 anchored him to his New Hartford farm and his large family of young children there, meaning that it was another five years before he again considered taking up journalism. In the winter of 1837-38, Beach was approached by Cooperstown's Democratic congressman, John H. Prentiss, about taking over management of the *Nashville Union* in the Tennessee capital, as it evolved from being the voice of Jackson to that of James K. Polk; the ensuing negotiations clearly failed, as that paper found a new editor in J.O. Bradford (of the family of Kentucky printers) in early 1838.

Shortly thereafter, Beach was appointed by now-president Van Buren as a clerk in the Post Office Department in Washington under Postmaster General Amos Kendall (1789-1869). This post became the employment he was most-often associated with in his later obituaries, ones erroneously reporting his continuous service there from 1838 to 1862. Rather, Beach served two separate stints in office, being removed twice from office for political reasons.

His first appointment ended in June 1849, when President Zachary Taylor, a Whig, ordered the Democratic clerk's replacement; he was returned to that position in 1857 by Democratic President James Buchanan. Immediately after this removal, Beach tried to use the ensuing partisan controversy to again solicit employment as an editor of a Democratic paper, citing several of the party's most prominent men as references, including Buchanan; when this appeal failed yet again, he was forced to sell his Washington home in December 1849 and return to New York.

This time Beach established his residence in Oneonta, having sold his New Hartford farm during his Washington years. There he quickly became involved in organizing the Albany & Susquehanna Railroad; that line was designed to link the principal market towns of central New York to the river-ports of Albany on the Hudson and Port Jervis on the Susquehanna, via a loop reaching west to Binghamton from each port. Beach was named as a director of the new line in April 1851, and a year later, he can be seen advertising the sale of land that he owned in and around Oneonta along the planned route, much in the style of railroad magnates later in the century.

Beach retired from the management of the railroad when reappointed to the Post Office Department in 1857. Once back in Washington, the aging journalist became a conspicuous presence in the gatherings of veterans of the War of 1812, ones held in the capital during the latter 1850s in an attempt to mitigate the growing sectional divisions in the country. Nevertheless, his well-known record of service in the militia in 1814 – defending Oswego from the British – did little to shield Beach from accusations of treason in 1861. In July of that year, the U.S. House of Representatives opened an investigation of those "employed in the several Departments of the Government, who are known to entertain sentiments of hostility to the Government of the United States." The report submitted in December 1861 by the investigating committee indicated that Beach's loyalty was suspect and that further inquiry into his "sentiments" was recommended; testimony had been presented stating that Beach's wife, as well as a son and a daughter of his, had openly voiced their support for the Confederacy, which suggested that he had similar ideas; Postmaster General Montgomery Blair wrote to the investigating committee in defense of Beach, enclosing letters attesting to Beach's loyalty from the current and former congressmen who represented Oneida County

(Republicans Richard Franchot and James Harper Graham); Blair's efforts proved to be in vain, however, and Beach was removed from office once again in early 1862.

The now seventy-five year-old journalist returned to his Oneonta residence a broken man, both professionally and physically, Contemporaneous reports suggest that dementia set in soon after he returned to Oneonta and eventually confined him to his house in early 1865. Beach died there on Tuesday July 31, 1866, "in the 80th year of his age." Even in death, he apparently remained a divisive figure, as the editor of the *Oneonta Herald* wrote that Beach had "gone to a just God, and his faults should be forgotten, and his good works cherished in the memory of those who are permitted to live and enjoy their fruits."

Unfortunately, Beach's reputation was further sullied almost exactly a year later. On July 10, 1867, his widow (and fourth wife) was shot and killed by their invalid son in a failed attempt at murder-suicide. Crippled in a firearms accident before the Civil War, Victor Beach was despondent over the state of the family's affairs after his father's death and so had decided to resolve the situation with a pistol while in a drunken rage; he survived the sad affair only long enough to be tried, convicted, and executed for the murder of his mother.

Personal Data

Born:	Late	1786	Near Meriden, Connecticut.
Married [1]:	June	1813	Marian Parsons @ Oswego, NY (d. 8/1813).
Married [2]:	Early	1814	Sophia Olivia D--- @ Oswego, NY (d. 5/1815).
Married [3]:	Feb. 19	1816	Ann Porter Taylor @ Oswego, NY (d. 1832).
Married [4]:	About	1834	Martha M. Bates @ Otsego County, NY (d. 1867).
Died:	July 31	1866	Oneonta, Otsego County, New York.
Children:	Amanda; Oscar; Walter; David; Betsey; Electa; Zopher; Victor; Laura; Napoleon; George; Chauncey; Emeline; Irene; and Martha.		

Genealogical sources omit third wife Ann and so attribute all fifteen children to wife Martha alone; uncertainty in their birth order and birth dates is what prevents a determination of actual parentage.

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Gregory; *Record of the Town of Meriden*; *Sketches of Graduates of Yale College*; mail notices in *Maryland Gazette*; *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*; *History of Oswego County*; *History of Political Parties in New York*; *Papers of James K. Polk*; news articles and obituaries in the *Virginia Patriot* (1810), the *Utica Patriot* (1817-24), the *Albany Argus* (1814-28), the *New-York Daily Advertiser* (1819-24), the *Cooperstown Watch-Tower* (1826-31), the *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser* (1831), the *Washington Daily Union* (1845-49), the *Washington National Intelligencer* (1847-62), the *Albany Evening Journal* (1851-67), the *Washington Star* (1861-62), and the *Washington National Republican* (1861-62); genealogical data from incomplete family charts posted on Anecstry.com (May 2014).