

## 470 BLAGROVE, HENRY B.

### Printer & Proprietor

### Richmond

Printer and proprietor of a job-printing office in Richmond (1812-13) with Daniel Trueheart (420), one financed by older brother Charles (036); later employed (1813-16) in *Richmond Enquirer* office of Thomas Ritchie (360); also cousin of Leighton Wood III (533).

Blagrove was a product of the Virginia printing trade who then took his trade skills to the national capital in search of greater opportunities than those available in his home state. There he followed a path then common to many printers by finding gainful employment as a government clerk.

His family originated in Williamsburg through associations within the Bruton Parish Church there. Blagrove was the son of the Rev. Benjamin Blagrove (1746-93), an Anglican minister actively involved in the Revolutionary movement, and Sarah Creese Pelham (1754-1834), a daughter of composer Peter Pelham (1721-1805), the church's long-serving organist, and a granddaughter of the like-named Boston mezzotint engraver (d. 1751). The couple married in the church in 1773, just two years after the minister arrived in Virginia from England; over the ensuing fifteen years, their union gave rise to at least 10 children, including nine sons. Son Henry was born sometime in 1784, probably in Richmond, where his father then served as chaplain to the General Assembly. The family moved on to Martin's Brandon Parish in Prince George County in 1785, then to Westover Parish in Charles City County in 1787, and to St. Peters Parish in New Kent County in 1789, before they landed at St. Paul's Parish in Hanover County in 1791; sometime before 1793, they had also established a residence in Richmond, which became the family homestead on the death of Rev. Blagrove that fall.

Following the father's death, three of his sons became a part of the American printing trade, two in Virginia (Charles and Henry), and one in Boston (William). Their mother's brother, William Pelham (1759–1827), had been sent to Boston before the Revolution to apprentice with his grandfather's former associates there, and now he offered a similar opportunity to his nephew, William Blagrove (1784-1828); Pelham was eventually succeeded in his book-selling business there by Blagrove, who remained in Boston until 1811.

Younger brother Henry emerged from the anonymity of the supporting cast of tradesmen in Richmond's printing offices in 1812, already a seasoned journeyman. That appearance came with the founding of the job-printing firm of Blagrove & Trueheart. That new concern was a successor to the printing office of Thomas Nicolson (315), which operated there from 1785 to 1808, when it was purchased by Nicolson's foreman, John O. Lynch (273) – also known as John O'Lynch – and continued until his premature death in August of 1812; at that time, Daniel Trueheart, a journeyman who trained under both proprietors, determined to secure the office for his own benefit. Needing funding to buy the establishment, Trueheart turned to the Blagrove family; Charles Blagrove was now the Registrar of the Virginia Land Office, and wanted a local contractor for his office's printing work, while Henry Blagrove was then in search of an independent position in the trade; consequently, the Registrar provided the necessary funds to acquire the press while printer Henry became the foreman in their new

office. In October 1812, the partners publicized their acquisition of Lynch's press office, promising that the firm would provide fine job-printing promptly to all who called.

Unfortunately, the Registrar ruffled a few feathers with this acquisition, as his public office now patronized his family's business; that manifest connection raised the suggestion of corruption in office – a charge that haunted the contracts made for Virginia's public printing ever since the Revolution. So in June 1813, just nine months after the firm was formed, the Registrar sold his interest in Blagrove & Trueheart to Thomas Ritchie (360), the proprietor of Richmond's legendary *Enquirer*. The succeeding firm of Ritchie & Trueheart advertised the same services as had its ill-fated predecessor; they also continued to print for the Land Office, and would do so for some time once Ritchie became the public printer in 1815.

What was most important for Henry Blagrove, though, was that he now became a key figure in the office that printed Ritchie's *Enquirer*. As that journal was essentially the voice of the Republican leadership in Virginia – the so-called Richmond Junto – Blagrove interacted with the best known figures in that party on a regular basis. Such was also the case as a result of his militia service during the War of 1812; Blagrove enlisted as a corporal in the Richmond Volunteers (as did Samuel Mordecai, the celebrated Richmond chronicler), one of the units that made up the 1st Corps d'Elite Brigade of Virginia Militia, commanded by Thomas Mann Randolph, son-in-law of Jefferson and a future Virginia governor; its artillery regiment was commanded by William Wirt, formerly the U.S. attorney for eastern Virginia and the future U.S. Attorney General; while the brigade was originally formed in 1791 to defend Richmond, the unit was federalized in early 1813 and sent to Norfolk in the summers of 1813 and 1814 in response to British naval activity in the Chesapeake. Blagrove mustered out of the unit when the brigade was broken up in March 1815. Yet, except for the two deployments to Norfolk, he remained in Richmond in Ritchie's employ throughout the war.

The unexpected death of his brother Charles in August 1814 made Henry the head of the Blagrove family in Virginia. As a legatee of the estate, he did not serve as executor, though he did have a hand in managing the bequests Charles made, particularly in administering the legacy given to support their mother Sarah. She would live out the rest of her life in residence with Henry. Along with the bequest that he received, the printer was now able to fund an independent press of his own. Still, Blagrove apparently also understood that he faced increased competition for such a business in Richmond, given the new-found primacy of the *Enquirer* office (and its ancillary presses), as well as the establishment of at least three new job-press offices in the city following the 1815 dissolution of the once-dominant *Virginia Argus* office of the late Samuel Pleasants (330). Hence, Blagrove decided to relocate to a setting he thought more conducive to such a new venture: the District of Columbia.

The election of James Monroe to the presidency in 1816 seems to have been the triggering event for Blagrove's removal. He had supported Monroe's candidacy while at the *Enquirer* and so likely anticipated that the new administration would bring changes to the standing arrangements for job-printing in the capital. Moreover, his brother William had moved to Washington in 1811 to take up a clerical position in the Department of the Navy, a job that he would retain in Monroe's administration. So the thirty-two-year-old bachelor apparently saw the benefits in reuniting a widowed mother with a prodigal son who now had a growing

family of grandchildren, while building a new printing business nearby.

Blagrove evidently made the move north in early 1817, shortly after Monroe's inauguration in March. He chose Georgetown as his new base, so avoiding the areas of Washington City devastated by the British in August 1814. An advertising notice that he published in May 1818 indicates that he initially took a one-year lease for an office space on Water Street in Georgetown, and then moved to new quarters on Bridge Street at that time. Another notice he published the preceding November suggests that his new business had successfully built a reliable customer base over his first six months in Georgetown, as do subsequent notices seeking subscriptions for books being printed in his office. By September 1819, Blagrove had found office space in the slowly-rebuilding city center where his business apparently then remained through 1826. However, the new administration did not patronize his press as much as Blagrove likely hoped, nor did its successors. The printers principally employed by the federal government between 1817 and 1826 remained the firms of Gales & Seaton (the publishers of the *National Intelligencer*) and of Edward De Krafft (1790-1833), with that of Peter Force (1790-1868) gaining prominence. Blagrove was contracted only occasionally for small jobs not a part of the regular government-printing work.

As his business fortunes faded, Blagrove decided to follow the path taken previously by his brother William, leaving the printing trade behind. Sometime in 1827, he was appointed by Secretary of War James Barbour (1775-1842), who had been governor of Virginia during the War of 1812, to a clerkship in the office of the legendary Quartermaster General, Thomas Sidney Jesup (1818-1860), originally of Berkeley County, Virginia. It may be that his decision to change occupations was influenced by personal as well as financial reasons. Blagrove had recently remarried after losing his first wife in 1822 and one of two infant sons in 1824; with responsibility for a new wife and possibly more children, the reliable salary of this clerical position would have been a powerful inducement to reorganize his finances. In any case, this change of focus meant that Blagrove never engaged in printing again.

For the next decade, Blagrove appears to have fulfilled his clerical duties to the satisfaction of the Quartermaster General. But in 1838, this comfortable situation deteriorated quickly. In 1836, Jesup had been sent to Florida by President Jackson to conduct what has come to be known as the Second Seminole War, leaving his Washington office in the hands of his assistant; that assistant was presented with a new boss in March 1837, the new Secretary of War under Martin Van Buren, Joel Roberts Poinsett (1779-1851) of South Carolina. In search of inefficiencies in government, Poinsett pressed the clerical staff in the War Department, so leading to growing disaffection among them. In January 1838, the clerks joined a broader effort among the clerical staff in the Executive branch generally to obtain increases in their salaries; the petition that was presented to the 1837-38 session of the 25th Congress asking for such increases included Blagrove's signature. Even as the Congress rejected the appeal, there was a backlash within each of the Executive departments. Absent Jesup's protective presence, Blagrove soon felt Poinsett's wrath; he was dismissed from his long-held position for "neglect of duty" on October 10, 1838.

It is unclear what employed the summarily-dismissed Blagrove over the next three years; but it appears that he soon drew on long-standing associations in the Georgetown business

community. In May 1840, he signed a petition from that community asking Congress to allow Georgetown's banks to decline making any payments in specie until banks in adjacent Maryland and Virginia resumed such payments; their plea was clearly an attempt to prevent the depletion of the hard-money reserves that had been accumulated with difficulty there after Jackson issued his infamous Specie Circular in 1836, which triggered the Panic of 1837, and so the subsequent cost-cutting initiatives during the Van Buren administration.

Blagrove did not again publish an advertising notice until the summer of 1841. When he did, it was for his new "Columbian Lottery Office" on Bridge Street in Georgetown. That venture continued until 1853, when his second wife died after suffering a series of strokes that left her "wholly helpless and speechless." Within three months, Blagrove had again changed his occupation, as well as abandoning Georgetown; in October, he announced the opening of a "Tobacco, Cigar, and Snuff Store" on King Street in Alexandria. And almost simultaneously, he married for a third time. The concurrence of these three events suggests that Blagrove's health was in decline when his second wife died, and that he needed to find both a less-stressful occupation and a new caretaker. Such a suggestion is supported by his ensuing death just three months later on January 16, 1854.

The former printer evidently left behind sizeable debts. Two weeks after his death, his third wife advertised an auction sale of the fixtures and stock of Blagrove's new tobacco shop "without reserve" as "Executrix of Henry Blagrove, dec'd." But that effort apparently yielded little relief. By the fall of 1854, his estate was sued by his creditors, seeking a court-ordered sale of the family dwelling on Montgomery Street in Georgetown; the fact that the sale took place less than a month after the suit was brought is indicative of the depth of Blagrove's indebtedness. What is more tragic than his insolvency, though, is that his sole surviving child, daughter Josephine, died unmarried, childless, and penniless just four years later.

### ***Personal Data***

Born:	In	1784	Richmond, Henrico County, Virginia (?).
Married [1]:	June 4	1817	Gracy Ann Ratcliffe @ Washington, DC (d. 1822).
Married [2]:	June 2	1825	Lorraine Duvall @ Washington, DC (d. 1853).
Married [3]:	Oct. 27	1853	Martha Churchman @ Arlington, VA (then DC).
Died:	Jan. 16	1854	Alexandria, Fairfax County, Virginia (then DC).
Children:	By Gracy Ann: John Henry (1819-24); Joseph A. (1821-48). By Lorraine: Josephine (d. 1858). The three children noted here seen in newspaper notices; Blagrove may have had other unrecorded children with Lorraine, but only Josephine survived him.		

Sources: Hubbard on Richmond; War of 1812 Service Records; Henrico County Wills Books; *Washington City Directory*, 1827; marriage records for Washington City & Fairfax County, Va.; Federal Decennial Census, 1840-50; various reports in *House Documents: 13th Congress to 49th Congress* (1826-38); Annual Reports of the Quartermaster General (1827-38); newspaper notices in *Richmond Enquirer* (1812=16), *Virginia Patriot*, Richmond (1814), *National Messenger*, Georgetown (1817-19), *National Intelligencer*, Washington (1819-58), *Georgetown Advocate* (1841-44), *Alexandria Gazette* (1853-550; genealogical data from *William & Mary Quarterly*, 1930.