

482 COMBS, SAMUEL

Bookbinder

Richmond, Petersburg

Bookbinder employed by John Pumfrey (344) in Richmond between 1802 and 1808; then by John Somervell (394) in Petersburg between 1808 and 1810.

Combs was an English-born tradesman who was part of the Virginia print trade for the first eight years of his residence in the United States. He arrived in Richmond in about 1802, just at the time that John Pumfrey was struggling to settle the affairs of his late partnership with Archibald Currie (113), who had died unexpectedly in April 1801.

Pumfrey found assistance in the person of William Fitzwhylsonn (165); the Welsh immigrant had resided in Richmond since 1786, conducting an "English" school (i.e. grammar school) for boys and girls, which drew him into the bookselling trade as a result of a need to provide books for his students. By 1801, his store had grown to such a point that he had to employ assistants. In mid-1802, he brought in Pumfrey as a partner, providing his store with an in-house bindery, so matching the capabilities of the leading Richmond bookstores of Samuel Pleasants (331) and William Prichard (343). The new concern was responsible for training a new generation of bookbinders as well, with Pumfrey holding the apprentice indenture of Charles Carter (476) from April 1804 to October 1807. Combs was apparently involved with this training as well, as Pumfrey left the bindery in his hands while he was "out of the state for a few months" in 1803, just a year after his arrival. Such an assignment indicates Combs arrived in Virginia as a trained journeyman, and quickly found employment in the expansion of the old Currie & Pumfrey shop into the larger one of Fitzwhylsonn & Pumfrey.

The alliance between Pumfrey and Fitzwhylsonn ended in July 1805, when Pumfrey set up an independent "stationary & bookbinding business." He evidently effected the parting by taking on the collection of the old firm's debts, a move that enriched Fitzwhylsonn while burdening himself – a burden that would crush him over the next three years. It seems that Combs left Pumfrey sometime during this period, perhaps as late as October 1808, when Pumfrey's residence in Richmond ended abruptly; the scale of his indebtedness apparently induced him to abscond with the proceeds from his sale of the estate of Patrick Ternan, a Richmond apothecary for whom he served as executor. That event marks a "not after" date for Combs's employment there, if he had not already moved to Petersburg by that time.

Still, the only evidence now known that Combs practiced his trade in Petersburg is a notice that he published in September 1810 announcing the opening of a book bindery in Raleigh, North Carolina, under the name of Samuel Combs & Co. Therein he reported that he:

"has conducted a Bindery for Messrs. Somervell & Conrad of Petersburg, and is emboldened to say that he is a complete master of the business."

The timing of Combs's relocation corresponds with significant changes in the print trade in Raleigh and Petersburg. The partnership of John Somervell (394) and the Conrad brothers (101-104) of Philadelphia came to an end that summer with Somervell buying his partners' interests and then forging ties to the Richmond publisher and journalist Samuel Pleasants (331), largely via his patronage of a new bindery opened in Petersburg in 1809 by William

Lownes (271), Pleasants's brother-in-law, so suggesting Combs's displacement. Moreover, July 1810 saw the arrival there of Richard Cottom (108) – a brother of and partner to Peter Cottom (107), the major Alexandria bookseller – and his bookstore and bindery business. At about the same time, the ownership of Raleigh's Federalist weekly, *The Minerva*, changed, with its founder, William Boylan (1777-1861), retiring from both journalism and bookselling. That shakeup created a vacant space where Boylan's subsidiary bookstore and bindery had been located, and left his successors – his brother, Abraham Hodge Boylan, and Alexander Lucas – in need of a new operative. Combs was apparently that replacement.

While the identity of Combs's partners was unstated, the new owners of the *Minerva* were likely among those unnamed partners. Indeed, he clearly maintained ties with both men through at least February 1824. During the War of 1812, he served as the 1st Sergeant in the Seventh Company of the Wake County Militia Regiment, and so was a superior to A. H. Boylan, the company's 4th Corporal. Sometime after the war, Alexander Lucas conveyed a building to Combs in trust for the use of the Raleigh Museum; hence, Combs became a part of a lawsuit in 1824 that saw that structure sold in auction sale to satisfy debts involving the museum's proprietor, Beverly Daniel. That litigation shows that he maintained some sort of a business relationship with the proprietors of the *Minerva*, even after that paper ceased publication in March 1821. Despite that association, though, his most regular connection to a newspaper there was with the *Raleigh Star* of Thomas Henderson, Jr. which frequently advertised that Combs would bind the volumes of that paper on reasonable terms; he was also seen in advertisements published in the *Raleigh Register*, the well-known Republican paper published by Joseph Gales Sr. and son-in-law William Winston Seaton (373), himself a former Richmond and Petersburg hand with ties to Fitzwhylsonn. (Seaton would join with Joseph Gales Jr. to acquire the *National Intelligencer* in Washington in 1812.)

Still, the published notices of the sale of the Raleigh Museum building are the last time that his name last appears in print. This is disconcerting for someone who had become a fixture in North Carolina's state capital over the preceding fourteen years. Consequently, Combs's subsequent career and fate remain unknown.

Personal Data

Born:	ca.	1782	in Great Britain.
Died:	After	1824	Unknown.

Sources: MEDSA entry no. 6961; Hubbard on Richmond; Scott, *British Aliens in the United States; Soldiers of the War of 1812, Detached from the Militia of North Carolina, 1812 and 1814* (1873); newspaper notices in Richmond (1803-08) and Raleigh (1810-24). Hubbard mistranscribed Combs's forename as "John" in his lengthy list of persons working in Richmond's print trade.