488 FAIRLAMB, JOHN R.

Bookbinder **Richmond**

Bookbinder in Richmond (1799-1801).

John R. Fairlamb was a Pennsylvania-born tradesman descended from the earliest Quaker settlers of that proprietary colony. Despite such rootedness, his life was one of transiency that ended finally in Georgia, with his Virginia days but a two-year-long stop on the way.

Born in 1775 in Middletown Township in Chester (now Delaware) County, Fairlamb's early life was shaped by the turmoil of the Revolutionary War. He was the eldest son of Samuel Fairlamb (1749-1853) and Hannah Richardson (1748-1817); his father was a tanner who also managed his father-in-law's tavern in the town of Chester; his grandfather and namesake was John Fairlamb (1713-66), who served as county sheriff, common pleas court justice, and delegate to the colony's assembly in the two decades before his death.

Samuel and his brother Nicholas appear to have been headed in the same direction as their father when the tumults of the Revolutionary era altered their paths. By December 1774, the brothers were part of efforts in Chester County to provide a permanent home for the newly-formed Continental Congress. Soon thereafter, Samuel was elected as one of the ten county delegates sent to the 1775 Provincial Convention that endorsed the recommended plan of the Congress to protest and nullify the so-called Intolerable Acts of the preceding spring. One of those proposed actions was the mobilization of colonial militias to check any military enforcement of those acts; as a result, the brothers were disowned that July by the Chester Monthly Meeting for "joining combinations concerning civil government and for military training." Though censured by the meeting founded (in part) by their grandfather, the Fairlamb brothers continued their anti-imperial agitations, with Samuel serving in the 1776 convention that declared Pennsylvania independent and then drafted a constitution for the new state; that same summer, he can be seen in official records supplying provisions for the militia groups in the neighborhood of Philadelphia.

Over the next two years, however, Samuel turned against the Revolution for reasons that are difficult to discern. That turn may have been a result of the way that pacifist Quakers were treated by American military leaders during the British campaign against Philadelphia in September 1777 which led to the occupation of the national capital. But whatever the reason, Samuel Fairlamb joined the British withdrawal from Philadelphia the following June, landing in New York City, where he opened a new tavern in the Bowery neighborhood. His wife joined him there in December 1779, evidently with the four-year-old John in tow.

Hence, when the British evacuated New York City in late 1783, following ratification of the Treaty of Paris, the Fairlambs became part of the Loyalist exodus to Nova Scotia. There, Samuel served as one of three principals in the "Quaker Company," a group of exile co-religionists that were granted a sizable tract of land in coastal New Brunswick, the newly-formed province split off from Nova Scotia in 1784 to accommodate the flood of Loyalist refugees from the United States. That grant, on Beaver Harbour in Pennfield Parish (as in Penn's Field), led to the 1785 settlement of the village of Belle View by 364 Quakers from

Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Yet this was ill-fated, as the village was destroyed in a forest fire in 1790, leading to the scattering of its inhabitants across New Brunswick's landscape.

The Fairlamb family was among the dispossessed, and eventually they returned south to the United States, though when and where to remains uncertain. As Samuel's brothers Nicholas and Frederick were emerging as leading political and commercial figures in Chester County in the 1790s, it is likely that the family returned to its Pennsylvania roots. Such a supposition is strengthened by the fact that those years were most likely the ones when an adolescent John Fairlamb obtained his training as a bookbinder, and nearby Philadelphia was then the largest print-center in the country.

What is certain is that the Fairlamb scion presented himself in Richmond as a fully-formed tradesman in May 1799. He evinced an apolitical stance in his advertising by employing the primary newspapers of both the Federalists and Jeffersonians there. Nevertheless, it seems that his business struggled from the start, as his sporadic notices reported his shop at three different locations in the first ten months of its operation. And after the last of those notices was published in March 1800, Fairlamb no longer appears in the city's newspaper record.

The records of the city's Hustings Court, though, indicate that Fairlamb departed Richmond abruptly in the spring of 1801, leaving behind him the stock of his stationery business and several defaulted loan notes. The litigation undertaken to recover those debts reveals that he had found helpful friends at the margins of Richmond's Quaker community and then left them in the lurch. His chief creditor was Virginia Ratcliffe (1776-1853), a life-long "spinster" who conducted the Sunday School at the city's [First] Baptist Church; the pastor there was the father of Richmond printer John Courtney, Jr. (109), who was a key part of the capital's Republican print-trade circle. Ratcliffe was also kin to the wife of Frederick Pleasants (1783-1827), one of the partners in the commission & exchange firm of Moncure, Robinson and Pleasants, then Richmond's largest and most reliable; he was, in turn, a cousin of the city's chief Republican printer-publisher, Samuel Pleasants (331), who had also advanced Fairlamb monies and/or materials for which he had not been paid. So too had James Lownes (1740-1830), the city's leading real-estate developer, and the father of Pleasants's wife, Deborah (328), and of his brother-in-law and bookbinder William Lownes (271). All of the members of this familial network were "lapsed" Quakers, with William Lownes becoming a founding member of a religious society associated with the Courtneys' Baptist Church later in life. The only litigant not evincing links to this social circle was William McKenzie (d. 1829), who was a commission & exchange agent in Richmond as well, and was the creditor with the smallest claim against Fairlamb. The settlement of these various claims was effected by the sale of Fairlamb's abandoned inventory in a sheriff's auction, with Ratcliffe being compensated first out of the proceeds, before Pleasants, Lownes, and McKenzie (in that order) secured their due from whatever monies remained.

The only notice of Fairlamb in 1801, outside of this court record, is in the *Proceedings of the Seventh Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States*, held in Philadelphia that June. He was the only Virginia representative, and then he was listed as being from Richmond alone. His tenure in the capital corresponds with the time that Robert Pleasants (1723-1810) of Henrico County's Curles Meeting – also

kin to Frederick and Samuel Pleasants – was engaged in promoting "freedom suits" in the county courts for slaves held in violation of the emancipation conditions of their masters' wills; in 1792, he had formed, with other Quakers in the Commonwealth, a *Virginia Society, for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, or Others, Unlawfully Held in Bondage, and Other Humane Purposes*, but that group was fading into oblivion by 1801 as a result of open resistance to its "humane" purpose among Virginia's slave-owners. Thus, it seems that Fairlamb used an opportunity to attend that convention as the declining society's delegate to escape his deteriorating economic situation in Richmond. But whether that was the case, or not, it is clear that he was gone from Virginia by June 1801 – and so the debt suits that were adjudicated that August.

Fairlamb is not again mentioned in public records until March 1808 in Augusta, Georgia, suggesting that in the interim, he either labored as an itinerant binder in unknown places or returned to the anonymity of Philadelphia's bindery shops. As he was a respected presence in that Southern city over the next five years, it looks as if he were well established in town when accounts of his selfless actions in fighting a fire there were widely republished in the country then. When a fire in the ramshackle storehouse of a cotton merchant endangered nearby structures, Fairlamb joined efforts to tear down neighboring out buildings that could fuel that spread – a common fire-fighting strategy of the day; he was wielding an ax on the roof of one of those sheds when the fire set off a keg of gunpowder stored beneath his feet; Fairlamb was severely injured, along with an enslaved man who was assisting him. The correspondent who reported the event praised him for his "devotion to the public safety," even as the bookbinder "received injuries which cannot be soon healed."

Those injuries may be the reason that Fairlamb did not advertise his services in an Augusta newspaper until June 1810. Yet once he had done so, he quickly built a relationship with the city's Republican journal, the *Augusta Chronicle*. His association with the largest of the three papers then published in that city evidently gave Fairlamb a greater social prominence than he had achieved in Richmond; he was appointed by the county court as 'Inspector of Flour' in May 1812 under a new law enacted by the state legislature to stem fraud in the sale and distribution of that vital commodity. Within days, he published a notice in the *Chronicle* of the statutory requirements for a lawfully shipped barrel of flour, effective June 16th.

Fairlamb's new-found public import was short lived, however. The bookbinder died in the ensuing March, date unknown, with county sheriff Peter Donaldson applying for "letters of administration" of his estate at the April 1813 session of the Richmond County Court. That application suggests that Fairlamb was heavily in debt, once again, at the time of his death, and that none of his friends or business associates in Augusta were willing to undertake the administration of his intestate estate, so leaving the task to the county sheriff.

Personal Data

Born:	In	1775	Chester (now Delaware) County, Pennsylvania.
Died:	March	1813	Augusta, Richmond County, Georgia

No evidence of wife or children found; none noted in probate record.

Sources: MEDSA Index nos. 11142 & 11143; Holmes, *Loyalists to Canada*; Richmond Hustings Court Order Books; *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Seventh Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States* (1801; Shaw & Shoemaker 51); and items in [Richmond] *Virginia Gazette & General Advertiser* (1799-1800), [Richmond] *Examiner* (1799), [Richmond] *Virginia Argus* (1800), [Savannah] *Public Intelligencer* (1808), and *Augusta* [GA] *Chronicle* (1808-13). Genealogical information drawn from records compiled by the United Empire Loyalist Association and family-tree charts posted on *USGenWeb.com* and *Ancestry.com* (March 2016).