

490 FITZ-RANDOLPH, JAMES

Apprentice Printer

Alexandria

Apprentice in the Alexandria office of Samuel Snowden (393), his uncle.

James Fitz-Randolph is best remembered as a political and commercial figure in New Jersey. But that career was built on a journalistic foundation, initially crafted in the press office of a maternal uncle in Alexandria, Virginia.

The Fitz-Randolph family of New Jersey descended from an English progenitor who was an early settler of Barnstable, Massachusetts. Their branch relocated to the neighborhood of Piscataway and New Brunswick in the early 1700s, emerging as one of the leading families in Middlesex County, New Jersey during the Revolutionary War. Lewis Fitz-Randolph (1757-1822), David's father, was one of at least a dozen family members who served in, and often led, units in the state militia during that formative era. As an ensign in the county militia, Lewis gained fame for leading three daring raids on British-held Staten Island in August and September 1780 that captured more than a dozen Loyalist residents there to be traded in later prisoner exchanges with the British. In 1782, Lewis married Rachel Snowden (1758-1822), who was apparently the eldest sister of printer Samuel Snowden, then just seven years of age. The couple had at least ten children in their forty-year-long union, with James being their fourth child and third son.

In late 1799, Samuel Snowden, now a journeyman printer in Baltimore, joined with editor Matthew Brown (057) to acquire the assets of the failing *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette* and started publishing a Federalist paper that came to be known as the *Alexandria Gazette*. It was in his press office that James apprenticed to the printing trade, alongside his elder brother David (489). As it is now understood that the brothers left their uncle's service in the winter of 1810-11, establishing the date when they began their training with him can only be approximated; but it must have been about 1803, when James reached age twelve, generally the youngest appropriate age for apprentices. That date corresponds with the conversion of Snowden's office from a partnership to a proprietary one, which strained his finances substantially, so making familial assistance a viable and desirable option.

Still, this kin relationship apparently proved awkward in the longer term. The Fitz-Randolph brothers were both keen Republicans employed in printing one of Virginia's most zealous Federalist journals. Moreover, Snowden's *Gazette* had effectively undermined the financial support for the city's only Republican newspaper, forcing its removal to Washington in early 1809. Lacking the funding needed to start their own journal there, and seemingly averse to contending with their uncle, the two young printers were compelled to find another locale where they could establish their independence in the print trade. So they chose to return to Middlesex County and establish a Republican sheet in New Brunswick, the county seat.

By February 1811, the brothers had acquired the tools needed to publish a weekly paper there and began soliciting subscriptions for a journal they called *The Fredonian*.

"The importance of this establishment, every Republican in the State must no doubt perceive, from the almost equally balanced returns of the elections in Middlesex and

some of the adjacent Counties. A little diffusion of correct information in that quarter, we are persuaded, would soon remove those doubts, which have for several years past, hung upon all of the important elections of New-Jersey."

Finding sufficient support, the *Fredonian* issued on April 17, 1811, and continued in the family's hands until April 1854. In its initial organization, David served as the paper's printer, with James acting as its editor. That division of labor allowed James to quickly emerge as a significant political personage in New Jersey. David, however, did not follow such a course. Rather, his life was one tied to the *Fredonian* until his retirement in 1854.

James, in contrast, became an ever more visible figure beyond New Brunswick. In 1815, he was appointed the Federal collector of internal revenue in Middlesex County, which forced his withdrawal from his partnership in the newspaper in 1816. Some sources report that he continued to edit the weekly until 1842, but such intimate involvement is improbable, given his subsequent roles; rather, he simply contributed to his brother's paper thereafter. With the contested election of John Quincy Adams in 1824, the Fitz-Randolphs generally shifted their allegiances away from their Democratic-Republican roots, and embraced the principles of the National-Republicans, on which the Whig Party was founded during the presidency of Andrew Jackson. *The Fredonian* led the way down that path in central New Jersey, with James providing his brother suitable editorials as needed. During this transitional period, he served successively as clerk of the Court of Common Pleas in Middlesex, then as one of the county's Assemblymen in the General Assemblies of 1823 and 1824, before being elected to Congress in 1828 as a supporter of the incumbent (and losing) president. He held that seat until the end of the 22nd Congress in March 1833, after declining probable re-election in 1832 in consequence of his increasing deafness – which only worsened over time.

On his return home, Fitz-Randolph became a part of the reorganization of the Bank of New Brunswick in 1834, and served as president of the resulting Farmers' and Mechanics' Bank of New Jersey. The business connections that he developed in this commercial role induced him to remove to Easton, Pennsylvania, in about 1848; there he engaged in the wholesaling of coal, mostly to New Jersey retailers, and built a considerable fortune in the process. Thus that Delaware River Valley town was where James died in early 1871.

NB: In the 1820s, many in the Fitz-Randolph family adopted a form of their surname that made the prefix "Fitz" into a middle name, so discarding any obvious connection to English royalty, as in the original meaning of that style, in an era that celebrated the common man. The best example of this is found in the name of Theodore F. Randolph, the son of James who served as New Jersey's governor after the Civil War.

Personal Data

Born:	June 26	1791	Piscataway, Middlesex, New Jersey
Married:	Feb. 20	1812	Sarah Kent Carman @ New Brunswick, New Jersey
Died:	Jan. 25	1871	Easton, Northampton, Pennsylvania

Children: Phineas Carman (b. 1813); Louise Mercein (b. 1815); Julia (b. 1817);
Isabella (b. 1819); Sarah (b. 1821); Edgar Snowden (b. 1823);
James E. (b. 1826); and Theodore (b. 1826).

Sources: Imprints; Queznel, *Samuel Snowden*; Clayton, *History of Union and Middlesex Counties*; and notices in the *Fredonian* (1811-63). Genealogical information from family charts on *Ancestry.com* (March 2016).

Some sources report his death date as 1872; date here taken from inscription on his grave stone (photo @ *findagrave.com*); that marker also records his name as being James F. Randolph, in the style employed by his son, who buried him, and as he was known once he moved to Easton.