

497 MAHANY, DAVID

Printer

Alexandria

Journeyman Printer who died in Alexandria in December 1820.

Mahany has left a spare trace of his work in the American print trade, one almost entirely found in the obituaries published in various journals after his death. He died in Alexandria at the close of 1820, although his employer at that time was not reported. Those notices did state that he was a native of Winchester, Virginia, then "in the 27th year of his age."

Two of those obituaries – one in a Washington paper, the other in a Baltimore one – are particularly unusual, as they are relatively long descriptions of the tradesman's virtues, and each is a unique statement written by that journal's editor. Both report that he had been a resident of that place before he arrived in Alexandria, indicating that he had had a close relationship with each journalist during those residences.

The longer of the two is that published in the *City of Washington Gazette* by editor Jonathan Elliot (1784-1846). He wrote that, during Mahany's time there,

"... the benevolence of his soul shone forth in the disinterested generosity with which he often relieved a fellow sufferer in distress; and his undeviating integrity, and the candor and sincerity of his manners had endeared him to those by whom he was known."

Then after describing his death among friends, far from family, Elliot closed with a snippet from William Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* (Act IV, Sc. 2), wherein the purported death of the wife of a protagonist was discussed:

"The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues."

A more florid view of the printer appeared in the *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser* of Ebenezer French (1787-1850) and Isaac Monroe (1785-1859). They wrote that:

"Notwithstanding the humble sphere in which it pleased an all-wise providence to circumscribe his operations in this sublunary scene, his *exemplary honesty, sterling integrity, equanimity of temper, and unrestrained sociability*, conciliated the affection and esteem of the few who enjoyed the confidence of his friendship."

Elsewhere, Mahany's death was reported in the one-line statements that were the standard of the day, though the *New-York Columbian* repeated the *Patriot's* italicized phrasing above. As four New York City papers carried news of his death, it would seem that he either had worked there at one time, or had colleagues within reach of those papers who did.

A digital search of newspapers published in the decade before his death, reveals a pattern of transient employments that fits with those published obituaries. Lists of unclaimed letters for four different post offices indicate that he worked successively in Cumberland, Maryland (December 1815), Baltimore (August 1816), Washington (October 1818), and

Alexandria (August 1820). As the *Baltimore Patriot* and the *City of Washington Gazette* were avowedly Republican newspapers, it seems clear that he started this journey in Cumberland with the partisan *Allegany Freeman* of Samuel Magill (1785-1871), and then joined French & Monroe in Baltimore in 1815 when they added a country edition to their evening daily. Next, Mahany joined Elliot in Washington during the 1816 elections, before landing at last in Alexandria in the fall of 1818. Then lastly, his infirmity kept him from work over the last few months of 1820, as intimated in Elliot's obsequies.

Just who Mahany worked with/for in Alexandria was left unstated, but if he was once again employed on a Republican press, it would have had to have been that of the *Alexandria Herald* of John Corse (106) and Nathaniel Rounsavell (367), the only such party press there between 1811 and 1826. But as several job presses were also in operation in Alexandria then, such an identification is purely speculative.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1794 Winchester, Virginia.

Died: Dec. 30 1820 Alexandria, Virginia.

No record of marriage or offspring yet found.

Sources: *City of Washington Gazette* (4 Jan. 1821); *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser* (4 Jan. 1821); *The American*, the *New-York Columbian*, and the *New-York Gazette & General Advertiser* (8 Jan. 1821); and the *New-York Spectator* (12 Jan. 1821).