

508 POLLARD, BENJAMIN

Bookseller

Norfolk

Bookseller in Norfolk in 1800.

Benjamin Pollard was a major, influential Norfolk merchant in the years immediately after the Revolutionary War. It was while conducting his import-export business that he sold a shipment of books to bookbinder & bookseller Edward Mirick (499) when that tradesman moved into Pollard's storefront in 1800, so requiring his inclusion in this Index, even as that one transaction is the only evidence of Pollard selling books in Virginia.

Before the war, Pollard was apparently a minor merchant in Culpeper County, where he had been born, a grandson of the first Pollards to settle in that neighborhood during the English Civil War. As he later evinced business connections in Bristol, it is likely that he was serving as resident factor for an unnamed merchant house there. He formed his initial connection to Norfolk in the fall of 1775, when the Culpeper County militia was dispatched to garrison the town in the wake of raids mounted by troops led by the fugitive royal governor, Lord Dunmore (153). Consequently, he was involved in the Battle of Great Bridge that December, which convinced the defeated British to abandon that region in January after burning that important Virginia port town. Over the next three years, the Culpeper unit was assigned to the Williamsburg area on garrison duty, which led Pollard to resign his commission as a captain in the Virginia Line in early 1780 in order to attend to his business interests. That decision proved fateful as he was captured near St. Eustatius in the Dutch West Indies when British ships attacked the small fleet of ships taking American goods to Europe on which he embarked. He was not returned to the United States until after the surrender at Yorktown.

On his return, Pollard opened a dry-goods business in Norfolk, drawing on his connections in Bristol. He accepted in-kind payments of tobacco, corn, flour, flax seed, lumber, and naval stores, which he then traded in both England and the Caribbean. With the profits realized from these ventures, he began speculating in real estate, in both town lots and the landed estates of departed Loyalists. These activities brought him public roles as a commissioner in various projects as the port was rebuilt; in 1784, he began a lengthy service as an alderman on the Common Council, serving as Norfolk's mayor in 1787. But following the death of his wife in 1795, Pollard turned his attention away from the retail side of his business, finally selling his store and its contents to Edward Mirick in 1801. Rather, he continued as simply a commission and exchange agent, organizing trading voyages and dealing in real estate. He was still actively engaged in this work when he died unexpectedly in Baltimore in late 1807. Pollard died intestate, a remarkably odd status given his long involvement in legal affairs.

Personal Data

Born:	ca.	1740	Culpeper County, Virginia.
Married:	May 26	1784	Abigail Taylor @ Norfolk County, Virginia (d. 1795)
Died:	Nov. 11	1807	Baltimore, Maryland

Children: By Abigail: Benjamin Pollard, Jr. & Margaret Pollard Loyall; given his age at this marriage, a prior wife and children are possible.

Sources: Whichard, *History of Lower Tidewater Virginia*; Revolutionary War Pension Applications for Benjamin & Robert Pollard (1832-34); *Simmons Norfolk Directory* (1801 & 1806); and notices in the *Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal* (1787-88), *Norfolk and Portsmouth Chronicle* (1789-92), *Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk & Portsmouth General Advertiser* (1792-94), *American Gazette and Norfolk & Portsmouth Advertiser* (1793), *Virginia Chronicle & General Advertiser* (1794), and *Norfolk Herald* (1799-1801).