

509 PUCKETT, WILLIAM

Apprentice Bookbinder

Richmond

Bookbinding apprentice assigned to William H. Fitzwhylsonn (165) and Walter Potter (339) in Richmond in 1815.

William Puckett was a tradesman whose life-long presence in Richmond's binderies is seen but four times in public records, with many years elapsing between each occurrence.

Puckett's first such appearance is in those of the Richmond City Hustings Court, wherein his indenture as an apprentice was registered by that court. Remarkably, he was bound out by that court twice. In July 1813, Puckett was one of three "poor orphan boys, aged thirteen years," ordered bound to weaver Robert Miller. But circumstances changed, possibly from Miller's declining financial situation, and in June 1815, the court ordered that he be bound out to "Fitzwhylsonn and Potter (Bookbinders)," now "a poor boy aged 14 years the 28 day of January last until he attain the age of 21 years."

The firm of Fitzwhylsonn & Potter operated between 1805 and 1817, conducting the second largest bookstore & bindery concern in the city, and then the largest after the dissolution of the "Argus Office" after the death of its owner, Samuel Pleasants (331), in October 1814. After Potter's death in 1817, the combine operated under Fitzwhylsonn's name alone, with the help of hired hands who were not brought into partnership as Potter had been.

Puckett was legally required to work in this office until January 1822, when he reached the age of twenty-one. Yet it appears that he remained with Fitzwhylsonn until the Welshman retired from business and closed his bookstore in 1830. In July 1831, Puckett resurfaces in the public record, when he began a month-long advertising appeal in the *Richmond Enquirer* promoting his new "Blank Book Manufactory" in the rear of the bookstore of John H. Nash (d. 1855). Nash had opened that store sometime between 1822 and 1824, and enlarged his business in 1829, apparently in anticipation of Fitzwhylsonn's retirement. However, Nash evidently overextended his finances in that expansion, causing his business to fail later that same year. The trustees assigned to settle his affairs kept Joseph W. Randolph (1815-93) as the store's manager, and eventually sold its stocks to Randolph as a part of the settlement. Puckett likely remained affiliated with the store during this transition, but clearly cut his ties to this situation when Randolph moved his business to Norfolk in 1834.

Just who Puckett worked for over the remaining years of his life remains uncertain, as he did not advertise his book-trade services in the city's newspapers again. He did, however, advertise the sale of lottery tickets from December 1839 to April 1840, from an office on the "Cross street above the Eagle Ruins, leading directly to the Gallego Mills." As that location was away from the center of Richmond's print-trade, it appears that he was conducting this business from his residence while employed as a journeyman in one of the city's many bindery shops – the common anonymous tradesman.

That Puckett continued in the trade until his death is established by his final appearance in the public record. In advance of the 1850 federal decennial census, the enumerators were required to compile a record of the deaths and causes in their place in the eighteen months

before the official date of the census – May 1st. That "mortality schedule" for Richmond reports that Puckett died of "neuralisis" in August 1849, aged 48, while still working as a bookbinder there.

Personal Data

Born: Jan. 28 1801 in Virginia.

Died: August 1849 Richmond, Henrico County, Virginia.

No verifiable information on wife and/or children yet found.

Family charts online conflict with the court-record evidence in relating a birth date for the Puckett who died in Richmond in 1849 as being 1802 in Charlotte County; they also report his marriage in Charlotte County in 1822. Neither point seems correct in the context of his indenture. Still, the binder may have married in early 1822, as one "Wm. T. Puckett, aged 4 years, 9 months" died in Richmond in October 1827, with a funeral conducted "from the residence of his Father, on Main Street." As the stores of both Fitzwhylsonn & Potter and John Nash were on Main Street during their lifetimes, this child could easily be the son of the bookbinder, but no other conclusive evidence for his wife or other children has been found. Rather, there are multiple individuals with his name in Virginia in his lifespan, so muddying the historical trail of this Puckett.

Sources: MEDSA Index nos. 29575 & 29374; Richmond City Hustings Court Order Books (10 &12); United States, "Nonpopulation Census Schedules for Virginia, 1850" (National Archives); Goode & Brock, *Virginia Cousins: A Study of the Ancestry and Posterity of John Goode*; and notices in the *Richmond Enquirer* (1827-40), [Washington] *National Intelligencer* (1827-40), and *Richmond Whig* (1840-55).