

**529 USTICK, THOMAS W.** – [Thomas Watts Ustick]

**Apprentice Printer**

**Abingdon**

Apprentice in Abingdon office of his uncle, John G. Ustick (421), in the 1810s.

Thomas W. Ustick was a Virginia-trained printer who later fashioned an influential career as a religious publisher in antebellum St. Louis. It was a course conforming to his family's multi-generational participation in the worlds of the print trade and the Baptist ministry.

The Ustick family of Philadelphia was launched on that course by the activities of *its pater familias*, the Rev. Thomas Ustick (1753-1803). He came to his calling early in life after being baptized by Rev. John Gano (1727-1804) of New York; he prepared himself for a ministerial career by attending the Rhode Island College (today Brown University), graduating in 1771; after filling pulpits in both New York and Connecticut, he was ordained in 1777, and then was called to the Philadelphia's Baptist Church in 1782, where he held forth until his death in 1803. In the sometime national capital, Rev. Ustick also became a bookseller and librarian out of a need to support his growing family, which eventually reached thirteen children, all with his only spouse, Hannah Whitear/Whittier (1750-1837).

Their first son, Stephen Clegg Ustick (1773-1837), was bound out as an apprentice in one of the printing offices associated with the father; he achieved trade independence in 1794 as partner to John Lang (1769-1836), his brother-in-law. Their printing office soon became one of publisher Mathew Carey's favorites; simultaneously, the Lang & Ustick office became the main press for the Baptist association headed by his father. When a yellow-fever epidemic struck Philadelphia in 1801, Rev. Ustick moved all of his children who still lived at home to nearby Burlington, New Jersey, where Stephen had set up a job-press after the federal government moved to Washington. There, his younger brother, John Gano Ustick (1784-1844), finished his training as a printer. After their father died in 1803, John began looking for places to shape his trade autonomy far from the competitive setting of Philadelphia. He found such in an offer to print a weekly paper in Lexington, Virginia, and so left his brother's shop in May 1804 to accept that tender. But that troubled paper closed in August 1805, prompting John to move to the Washington County seat of Abingdon, where he opened his first newspaper as a solitary proprietor: the *Holston Intelligencer and Abingdon Advertiser*.

The success John found in Abingdon persuaded his older brother, Thomas Whitear Ustick (1776-1830), to join him in Virginia, moving his growing family to Washington County from Philadelphia in the summer of 1806; among the three children that came with him was five-year-old Thomas Watts Ustick. Born in Philadelphia just before the 1801 epidemic, he was the third child borne by his mother, Hannah Taylor (1776-1858), and his parent's first son. Eventually, he was assigned to his uncle's Abingdon printing office as an assistant, probably during the War of 1812, when trade labor was hard to find. This was an interesting turn, as his father was building a substantial and profitable farm in Washington County, for which the son stood first in line to inherit. But it appears that young Ustick found the print trade a more desirable pursuit than farming, as he embraced the trade for the rest of his life.

## Transitions

Sometime in early 1820, John G. Ustick moved his business from Abingdon to Wytheville, some 50 miles down the valley to the north, probably in reaction to the financial distress raging through the region as a result of the Panic of 1819; his newspaper went with him, becoming the *Wythe Gazette*. However, it is unclear whether his nineteen-year-old nephew did as well. Later that same year, Stephen C. Ustick moved to Washington, D.C., to join the office of the *National Intelligencer*; shortly thereafter, the uncle formed a business alliance with Andrew Rothwell (1801-83), another a Philadelphia-trained printer of the Baptist faith who had worked in the *Intelligencer* office as well. The resulting firm of Rothwell & Ustick went from being a partnership between Rothwell and Stephen C. Ustick to another between Rothwell and Thomas W. Ustick in about 1827, when the uncle opened a separate printing office, one that he subsequently moved to Alexandria in about 1833. Therefore, the date that the fully-trained nephew left the printing office of one uncle for that of the other is uncertain, but it was sometime in the span between 1820 and 1826, for in that latter year, T. W. Ustick became a member of the city's Typographical Society.

The most enduring mark left by the firm of Rothwell & Ustick on the American print trade is the journal they printed from July 1828 to November 1830 for George Watterston (1783-1854), the third Librarian of Congress: the *Washington City Chronicle*. Described as being a literary paper, in light of Watterston's artistic & poetic proclivities, the weekly made its first appearance in the midst of the 1828 presidential campaign between John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. All three principals – Watterston, Rothwell, and Ustick – were known anti-Jackson figures, and so their sheet assumed a Whig outlook, even as it did not embrace the heated rhetoric commonly seen in journals from this period. Watterston had written previously in other city papers in support of Henry Clay, and so had been in conflict with Congressional Democrats from 1825 onward. Thus, no one was surprised when the newly-elected Jackson removed him from his post in May 1829, nor was it unexpected that he lobbied for his reinstatement in the pages of the *Chronicle* for the rest of that year. He Watterston moved that campaign to the pages of the *Daily National Journal* early in 1830, compelling Rothwell and Ustick to find a new editor. They found one in Rev. Walter Colton (1797-1851), by acquiring the paper he then edited, the *Columbian Register*, and folding it into their weekly. Colton continued with the renamed *American Spectator and Washington City Chronicle* until it was sold to James C. Duncan in November 1830.

That sale appears to presage Ustick's departure from Washington. By the ensuing summer, he had relocated to Philadelphia. Also in November 1830, the publisher of the city's *Banner of the Constitution*, Condy Raguet (1784-1842), relocated his journal to New York City. The former U.S. consul in Rio Janeiro (appointed by Adams while secretary of state) was using that sheet to promote free-trade ideas, and evidently thought that moving it to the center of American protectionist sentiment would help change the course of national policy. But Raguet's message seems to have fallen on deaf ears there and so he moved his paper once again in May 1831, this time to Philadelphia, his birthplace. There it issued from the job-press of Thomas W. Ustick. Ustick had already evinced similar ideas in items published in his *Chronicle* during Colton's regime. So it may be that the printer had a hand in this second removal, giving both native-born Philadelphians a chance to return to their hometown, and

so distance themselves from the ever more toxic environment of Washington journalism. Ustick continued to print Raguets' *Banner* until it ceased publication at the end of 1832. But it was not his primary function in Philadelphia. He conducted a working job- and book-press there, one that became an important producer of Baptist imprints, just as had been the old Lang & Ustick office. He also published a series of tracts aimed at lifting the moral standards of the city's artisans and tradesmen.

All the same, Ustick's name is not noted in any imprint record there after 1836, and he is not seen again in other such records until 1843 in St. Louis, Missouri. That void indicates that Ustick closed and/or sold his Philadelphia office sometime that year and embarked on a series of anonymous employments as journeyman, as had his uncle Stephen on occasion. The obscurity of such work makes it difficult to determine how Ustick made his way from Philadelphia to St. Louis, but his bachelorhood gave him the ability to move about the country largely unencumbered. Some nineteenth-century histories report that Ustick spent much of this period working in press offices in Chicago, but no imprints bearing his name from that place are now known. One Baptist history asserts that he arrived in St. Louis in 1839, which is certainly reasonable, as the life-long bachelor finally married there in June 1841, taking as his wife Susan Ferguson (1820-72), the daughter of a prosperous exchange broker there. Yet he is not listed in the city's directories until 1844, a year after the imprint record shows that he opened an independent office there in 1843.

### **Stability**

For nearly a quarter-of-a-century, Ustick operated a highly-profitable job-press in St. Louis, one "prepared to execute every description of Letterpress Printing." Initially, he conducted the business as a partnership with one Daniel Davies, but after 1845, Davies no longer lived in the city; that Ustick alone printed the monthly *St. Louis Magnet* for Thomas J. McNair (b. 1823) – a physician interested in electromagnetism, hypnosis, and phrenology – starting in May 1845 suggests that the pair had ended a two-year partnership earlier that spring. Yet the specific nature of his imprimatur hides the fact that, from his arrival, he was assisted in his efforts by his youngest brother, William Watts Ustick (1816-1902); he probably had an interest in the office as well, as the concern's name was often reported as Thomas W. Ustick & Co. between 1845 and 1854. Another assistant was apparently Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), who worked for Ustick during the summer of 1853, according to local lore.

As in Philadelphia, Ustick promptly began publishing items for various Baptist associations in Missouri, while becoming a leader in the city's Baptist community. Remarkably, one such work was a pamphlet-sized memorial to his grandfather, the Rev. Thomas Ustick, written by Abram Dunn Gillette (1807-82), and issued some 45 years after his death. Accordingly, he was intimately involved in publishing two Baptist monthlies, though each suffered an abrupt cessation from circumstances beyond Ustick's control.

The General Baptist Association of Missouri had sponsored the publication of the *Missouri Baptist* weekly in 1842; but that paper expired in 1844, evidently from the departure of its unnamed editor. Still determined to publish such a paper, the new General Association of United Baptists of Missouri formed a committee in 1846 "to prepare a prospectus of a

religious newspaper, to be published in St. Louis." The resulting prospectus was issued as a specimen issue of *The Western Watchman* that November with the goal of gathering 1250 "responsible subscribers" for the new periodical. By the following summer, the committee decided to proceed with the publication, despite having not obtained the requisite number of subscribers. That fall, they negotiated a contract with Ustick for printing the sheet, with committee member Rev. Samuel W. Lynd (1796-1876) agreeing to edit the new journal, which issued in June 1848. Lynd had been called to serve in Ustick's church from Covington, Kentucky, in September 1845, where he had opened and led the Western Baptist Institute; he was another Philadelphia-born Baptist who Ustick may have known in Washington when Lynd was pastor of the Navy Yard Baptist Church. Now they worked together to make *The Western Watchman* a success. However, in May 1849, a massive fire destroyed the central business district in St. Louis, taking three partisan newspaper offices with it, as well as that of T. W. Ustick & Co. The *St. Louis Union* reported that Ustick saved his books and papers, but lost all of his printing tools. Unable to continue the weekly until his office was rebuilt, the *Watchman* went into suspension. The Association used this interruption to transform their donation-based effort into an autonomous stock company. In the process, Lynd vacated the editorial chair in favor of William Crowell (1806-71), late editor of the *Christian Watchman*, a Baptist weekly published by the Baptist Missionary Society of Massachusetts in Boston. The *Watchman* resumed publication in May 1851, with Crowell remaining at its head for the next decade. However, he gave the weekly an ever more strident proslavery perspective over those years, one consistent with the views of many Southern Baptists, but one that drove Ustick and other anti-slavery Baptists away from the project. The journal died at the start of the Civil War, being a Southern paper in a city controlled by the North.

In April 1859, a new publishing effort was started so as to counter Crowell's *Watchman*. The nascent Missouri Baptist Publication Society convinced Rev. Samuel H. Ford (1819-1905), editor of the *Christian Repository* in Louisville, to come to St. Louis to edit the new *Missouri Baptist* for them, and then engaged Ustick to print it. Its first number issued in March 1860; but as Ford proved to be a Southern nationalist, the paper was suppressed in June 1861, leaving Ustick on the sidelines once again.

In the interval between these two ventures, Ustick felt the need to form a new partnership, most likely in order to recapitalize his office after incurring the heavy expense of rebuilding it. In 1853, he brought in a New-Hampshire-born journeyman named Robert Page Studley (1826-90) as that partner, thereby creating the new firm of Ustick, Studley, & Co. It was an alliance that survived about ten years.

## **Endings**

That change may also have been a product of the departure of his brother; W. W. Ustick left St. Louis in early 1852, moving to the new town of LaCrosse, Wisconsin, to manage the press of the *Spirit of the Times* for proprietor Albert Duratt La Due (1826-1907). When the mortgage La Due had used to buy the office was foreclosed on in 1853, the youngest Ustick became that paper's owner, briefly, when his *pro forma* bid proved to be the high one; not wanting to follow La Due's unhappy course in bankruptcy, the printer immediately sold the office, but the journal quickly died when those tools went missing before the new owner

could use them – a Democratic scheme against that Whig paper. Ustick became a successful merchant in the town, which apparently induced his brother to consider relocating there as well. In April 1856, Thomas bought 120 acres of land, in three adjoining tracts, in LaCrosse County, and then another 30 acres in August 1858; yet he never acted on the potential move these purchases represented. In the end, William left LaCrosse, moving to Dubuque, Iowa, after the war, where he returned to the print trade, becoming that town's leading publisher – and the family's chief genealogist.

Thomas W. Ustick followed a different course, successfully working his way through the war by bringing his eldest sons – John and Edward – into his business once his partnership with Studley expired. It is evident that he had decided to keep his office in the family, rather than seek opportunities elsewhere. After more than 20 years in St. Louis, Ustick was both well-respected and comfortably well-off, despite the disruptions of the war years. Unfortunately, that status did not protect him from the caprice of unchecked diseases. Born in the shadow of one epidemic, Ustick died in another, perishing in a cholera outbreak that ravaged the city in August 1866.

His job-press became the purview of the new firm of J. T. & E. T. Ustick. But his sons could not compete effectively in the long term with the larger, mechanized presses that appeared in St. Louis in the 1870s. Indeed, their father had been a part of that transition as a valuable associate of Thomas H. Burrige in developing the "improved printing press" that Burrige patented in 1859. So both sons eventually moved to Chicago as wholesalers of the volumes of paper those new machines used, profiting well from the change in focus and venue.

### ***Personal Data***

Born: Aug. 22 1801 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.  
Married: June 2 1841 Susan Ferguson @ St. Louis, Missouri.  
Died: Aug. 13 1866 St. Louis, Missouri.  
Children: John Thomas (1842-1932); Edward Taylor (1846-1931); Amanda Elizabeth (1849-1938); William Josiah (1859-1937); Ella Lee (1863-1942).

Sources: Imprints; U.S. Newspaper Directory, Library of Congress; Cathcart, *Baptist Encyclopaedia*; Duncan, *History of the Baptists in Missouri*; Yeaman, *History of Missouri Baptist General Association*; Crew et al, *Centennial History of the City of Washington* (1892); St. Louis City Directories (1842-1868); Butterfield, *History of La Crosse County* (1881); U.S. Land Office Records (1856-58); U.S. Patent no. 26,545 (Dec. 1859); and published notices in [Washington] *National Intelligencer* (1824-37), and *St. Louis Union* (May 1849-66). Genealogical information from *Ustick Family Register*, pt. 1 (1891).