

## 534 POWERS, WILLIAM

Printer

Virginia

Printer in Virginia in 1809; probably died in Norfolk in 1816.

William Powers is known to have been part of Virginia's print trade from an announcement of his marriage printed in a Boston newspaper. That one notice has led to the identification an imprint bearing his name as one issuing from an anonymous Virginia press. Likewise, it implies that a death notice published in Norfolk in 1816 refers to this journeyman printer.

In February 1809, Benjamin Parks, publisher of *The Democrat* in Boston, reported that one "William Powers, printer, of Virginia," had recently wed Lucy Stoddard of Charlestown, Massachusetts. The bride was descended from one of that state's earliest settlers, Jonathan Stoddard, who was among the Puritans who came to America in 1630 with John Winthrop. By the time of the Revolution, several of Stoddard's descendants were engaged in the print trade in New England, which suggests that Powers had made the acquaintance of his future wife while working alongside one or more of her kin. As that notice was reprinted in a paper in Walpole, New Hampshire, it appears he had also been a part of the network of transient print-tradesmen that thrived after the war between Boston and the small towns of interior New England. However, neither notice mentioned his place of origin or Virginia residence.

In 1810, Powers printed and sold "an epitome of the Bible in verse, written by John Taylor, commonly known as the Thumb Bible." It was a miniature book, barely 2 inches tall, which synopsized the Bible in verse for children. Taylor's work was first published in 1614, and was such a steady seller that new editions of this two-part title – *Verbum Sempiternum* [covering the Old Testament] and *Salvator Mundi* [covering the new Testament] – were issued well into the nineteenth century. Powers evidently saw a need for another new edition in 1810, but where he produced the imprint is not recorded in the text or imprimatur. As a result of the 1809 marriage notice, bibliographers have assigned this work to an unknown Virginia press, presuming that Powers returned to the Commonwealth with his new bride.

That presumption is bolstered by a death notice printed in Norfolk's *American Beacon* in October 1816; it was one of a series published "by request, for the information of their friends in some of the Northern Cities."

Died ... On the 17th inst., of a very short illness, Mr. William Powers, aged 32 years."

While this notice does not record the decedent's profession, the fact that it appeared only in the *American Beacon* suggests that he had an association with its publishers – Hamilton Shields (380), William C. Shields (381), Seymour P. Charlton (089) – even though its form is unreported. Such a solitary notice is also typical of ones published on the death of a worker in the office of that particular newspaper. Moreover, the notice concerns someone who was a relative newcomer to Virginia. Hence, these patterns imply that this Powers was a printer, and so the journeyman mentioned in 1809 and the publisher of the 1810 "Thumb Bible." However, it is possible that the marriage and death notices refer to different people, given the printer's common name. But given Norfolk's well-known mercantile links to all of the county's coastal ports, and the transiency then common to the American print trade,

this Index accepts the existing opinions that these three reports represent the same person. And that his life ended early and abruptly far from his New England friends and relations.

***Apparent Personal Data***

Born: ca. 1784 Apparently in New England.  
Married: In Feb. 1809 Lucy Stoddard @ Charlestown, Massachusetts.  
Died: Oct. 17 1816 Norfolk, Virginia.  
Children:

Sources: Imprint (Shaw & Shoemaker 19540); [Boston] *Democrat* (22 Feb. 1809); [Norfolk] *American Beacon and Commercial Diary* (30 Oct. 1816).