

## 540 RIVES

### Publisher

### Lynchburg

Publisher of the *Lynchburg Centinel* (1814-15) with Addison Davies (539).

Rives was an essentially anonymous partner in the firm of Rives & Davies, publishers of the *Lynchburg Centinel* during the War of 1812.

In August 1814, Addison Davies circulated a prospectus for "publishing a paper in the town of Lynchburg, by Rives and Davies; to be entitled the Lynchburg Centinel." While no issues of this weekly are known to have survived, the course of its brief life can be traced in references to the sheet seen elsewhere. It appears that the *Centinel* began publishing about September 1st that year, based on a broadside "extra" edition issued on September 10th, describing the withdrawal of British forces from Washington and Alexandria after they had burned the capital's public buildings on August 25th. It continued through that fall – as an 1815 almanac issued from that office in late 1814 – with mentions of the *Centinel* seen in Amherst County Court records in the spring of 1815, and in Norfolk newspapers until October 1815. But by late November 1815, it is clear that its publication had ceased; at that time, a lengthy notice appeared in Washington's *National Intelligencer* announcing the sale of the journal's office at auction on December 20th.

"The pre-eminent advantage is connected with the situation of Lynchburg for the publication of a Newspaper, render the present advertisement an important object of attention to all persons who may be desirous of engaging in this very profitable species of employment. The rapidly encreasing population of Lynchburg will soon make even the local patronage of the town fully adequate to the support of a newspaper; besides which, the numerous subscription may be expected in the neighboring country, and the more remote western parts of the state which have been accustomed to look to Lynchburg as their principal medium of intelligence from the Atlantic. There is but one paper published in Lynchburg, besides the Centinel, so that nothing is to be apprehended from competition."

The abrupt cessation suggests that the *Centinel* was a hurried effort that was financially failing, despite Davies's manifest association with the wealthiest family in the area. Just four months before the *Centinel* first appeared the *Lynchburg Star* of James Graham (183) had ended a nine-year run, apparently in consequence of the death of the proprietor's wife. The *Star's* demise precedes the start of the *Centinel* closely enough to lead one to believe that it was at least a successor to the *Star* if not a continuation of that paper. Moreover, the similarity of the typography seen in the surviving extra edition to that of the *Star* indicates that as well. And if so, this auction sale embodied a chance to continue challenging the larger *Lynchburg Press*, which suffered through a major reorganization in October 1815. Yet the lack of supporting evidence and surviving issues makes such an appraisal speculative.

Even more mysterious than the origin and purpose of the *Centinel* is the identity of Davies's partner in the project. The Rives family was then an extensive one in the counties north of Lynchburg, which makes it difficult to suggest any one person as the unnamed Rives in the

firm of Rives & Davies. But the Amherst domicile of Robert Rives (1764-1845) and Margaret J. Cabell (1770-1815) offers two intriguing prospects. The father was a prominent merchant-planter in the county; his two eldest sons were contemporaries of Addison Davies, and so ready possibilities. But of those two – Landon Cabell Rives (1790-1870) and William Cabell Rives (1793-1868) – the latter seems the most likely.

A graduate of the College of William & Mary, the future U.S. Senator began his public life by studying law with Thomas Jefferson at Monticello after he retired from the presidency. The standard biographies of Rives report that he was admitted to the Albemarle County bar in May 1814 before they jump forward to his first major public oration in Nelson County in July 1816, leaving a gap in those accounts matching the short life of the *Lynchburg Centinel*. Moreover, while he was studying with Jefferson, he was undoubtedly aware of the litigation in Bedford over the estate of Henry Landon Davies (1745-1808). Shortly after Rives started his studies in 1809, the Rev. Charles Green Clay (1745-1820) wrote to Jefferson asking about his recollections concerning the settlement of the estate of Nicholas Davies (1709-1794), Henry's father and Addison's grandfather, in the 1790s, when the former president was part of that process as his father's heir; Clay was rector of Lynchburg's Episcopal Church, a friend of Jefferson's dating back to that same period, and the husband of Editha Landon Davies (1777-1838), Addison's older half-sister; he was concerned that his wife was being deprived of her due from her grandfather's estate by her brothers in their role as administrators of their father's estate while it was probated; as such disputes were common ones then, it is likely that Jefferson provided Rives a lesson in property law by researching that case before he replied to Clay; if so, then Rives probably came to know the members of the Davies family then engaged in litigating Henry's estate, including Addison Davies. Still, the evidence for his identification as the publisher's partner is clearly circumstantial.

Nevertheless, the closure of the *Lynchburg Centinel* ended the print trade career of Davies, who died eighteen months later. But the fate of Rives is unknown because of the anonymity embodied in the publishers' corporate name.

***No Personal Data yet verified.***

Sources: Imprints (Hummel no. 3276 & item 1814.080 in this Index); *Lynchburg Centinel, Extra*, Sept. 10, 1814 (Duke University Library Special Collections); notices in [Washington] *National Intelligencer* (25 Nov. 1815); and *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Genealogical material from Early, *Campbell Chronicles and Family Sketches*, and Brown, *Cabells and Their Kin*, both quoted repeatedly online.