

542 ALLEN, BONAPARTE

Apprentice printer

Lynchburg

Apprentice in Lynchburg office of Jacob Haas (196) and Samuel Bransford (050) in 1816.

The only evidence that Bonaparte Allen was a part of the Virginia print trade is found in the notices published by the proprietors of the *Lynchburg Press* of his flight from their office in August 1816, to wit:

Twenty Dollars Reward.

PRESS OFFICE,

Lynchburg, Va. August 9, 1816.

RAN-AWAY from the subscribers on the 6th instant, an Apprentice to the PRINTING BUSINESS by the name of BONAPARTE ALLEN—about 16 years of age, from 4 to 5 feet high; light hair, gray or blue eyes, had on when he went off a light drab coat, light cross-barred cotton pantaloons, a furred hat – his other clothing not recollected. We think he is aiming towards Abingdon, Va.—Any person who will secure said boy, so that we get him again, shall receive the above reward and reasonable charges if brought home.—We forewarn all persons from harboring, or employing said boy, as we are determined to put the law in force against such offenders.

HAAS & BRANSFORD.

Given that Allen was reported as being 16 at this time, he was evidently the boy of the same name bound out at the age of 12 as an apprentice silversmith in Edenton, North Carolina four years earlier. A review of probate records there reveals that he was the "natural son" (i.e. illegitimate) of Nathaniel Allen, a civic and business leader in Edenton who died in 1805. And in that discovery the context of his flight can be surmised, though not his fate.

Nathaniel Allen was the nephew of Joseph Hewes (1730-79), the Edenton maritime trader who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He inherited his uncle's business and political mantle after the Revolution, as well as much of his estate. Allen's will relates that he was father to four children, a daughter named after his previously-deceased wife, Mary Granberry, and "three natural sons, Francis, Bonaparte, and William begotten on the body of the said Fanny Coulston." He then directed his executors to equally divide the residue of his estate between Mary Allen and Fanny Coulston, with his mistress charged with sharing her portion equally with their sons. Allen's estate was finally settled in December 1811, at which time his twelve-year-old son Bonaparte was bound out as an apprentice to Martin Noxon, an Edenton silversmith and clockmaker as an apprentice silversmith.

After that settlement, Mary Granberry Allen married Rev. Pleasant Thurman (1783-1856), the Methodist minister there; they moved to Lynchburg that same winter, where Thurman filled the pulpit previously occupied by Rev. Samuel K. Jennings (236). Once established in Lynchburg, it appears that Mary was able to have the indentures of Bonaparte and youngest brother William transferred to masters nearby. However, the Thurmans became disaffected slaveholders in the Virginia piedmont; they freed their slaves and left Lynchburg in 1815,

making Chillicothe, Ohio their new home.

That departure antedates Bonaparte Allen's flight by perhaps six months, suggesting that he left the Haas & Bransford office once his sister was settled in Chillicothe. The biographies of his brother support that suggestion as well. William Allen (1803-79) was later a U.S. Senator (1837-49) and governor of Ohio (1874-76); he reported that he had also absconded in 1816 from a Lynchburg apprenticeship, this to a saddler, in order to join his sister in Chillicothe, who then provided for his education. So it appears that the two youngest sons of Nathaniel Allen joined their sister and her husband in Ohio that year, and that they probably travelled together on that journey.

The life of William Allen is well documented from his long career in the law and politics. However, the destiny of older brother Bonaparte is unknown. He may have removed to Arkansas, as his name recurs there in persons born in the 1840s and early 1880s; but the printer's apprentice is not seen in any census or public record after he fled Lynchburg 1816.

NB. Many Ohio histories maintain that the Thurmans left Lynchburg in 1819, based on their son's published obituaries in 1895; but his campaign biographies report a date of 1815 and state the reasons, where his obituaries did not; he was Allen Granberry Thurman (1813-95), a major political figure in Ohio in his own right, who filled the vacant vice presidential slot in Grover Cleveland's unsuccessful reelection campaign of in 1884.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1799 Edenton, Chowan County, North Carolina.

Sources: MESDA Index no. 333; notice in [Norfolk] *American Beacon and Commercial Diary* (22 Aug. 1816); *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*; will of Nathaniel Allen and estate settlement, Tyrell County [N.C.] Court records (1805-11); A.G. Thurman biographies in Chillicothe newspapers (1880-92).