

Printer

Norfolk

Printer in Norfolk in 1810.

Charles Arlington is known to have been a part of the Virginia print trade from an account of the meeting of Virginia's first Typographical Association in Norfolk in 1810. That meeting was a dinner celebrating the Fourth of July and he was one of those present who offered a toast at the meal's end. Still, that one report is all that is known of this journeyman.

The account of this dinner is worth repeating, as it provides a window into both the ethos of the early-Republic print trade, and the state of humor among Norfolk's tradesmen then. It also evinces the comradery within the trade, despite the sharp political divisions between the editor-owners who employed them. Arlington's toast is seen in **bold** below.

"The Journeymen Printers of this Borough taking into consideration, that whilst this day is celebrated by all denominations of mechanics in the greater part of the United States; and conceiving that they would display a manifest remissness by being dilatory in paying that respect which their northern brethren have annually observed, resolved to associate themselves into a company and dine together. When *Daniel Baxter* was chosen President, and *George Nestor* Vice-President. — The company assembled at an early hour, when the Declaration of Independence being read, and a pertinent discourse addressed to them on the "rise, progress, nature and effects of the art," they sat down to an elegant dinner. After the cloth was removed, the following toasts were drank, interspersed with songs. &c.

"1. The Day we celebrate,

————— 'But what is life?

'Tis not to stalk about, and draw fresh air

From time to time, or gaze upon the sun;

'Tis to be free. When liberty is gone,

Life grows insipid, and has lost its relish.' [Addison's *Cato*: Act 2, Sc.3]

"2. Printing. — 'The art preservative of all arts.'" Chaos enveloped the horizon, superstition reigned, but this heavenly invention dispelled the gloom and caused reason to triumph.

"3. The inventor, and first promoters of printing.—*Characters* designed by Heaven to *distribute* usefulness to man—their forms are off, may their *tokens* be remembered to all perpetuity.

"4. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN—The pride of our profession.

His *heap* is off, his *balls* are dry,

His *case* in rack, his *form* is pie;

Yet, shall the *works* he's left behind,

Impress his worth on ev'ry mind;

While each his honor'd image wears,

Grav'd on the badge his bosom bears,
Shall cry, and press it to his heart,
Behold the patron of our ART!"

"5. The United States of America—*Solid forms* and *locked tight*—May the *risings* of demagogues never *squabble* their union, or *burst* the harmony which now unites them.

"6. GEORGE WASHINGTON, and the departed Heroes of America—Their sentiments were *correct*—their deeds *justifiable*; my prosperity take their conduct as the *leading line* of their actions.

"7. JAMES MADISON, and the Heads of Departments—Their *faults* are as *feint* as the point of a diamond—the *brush* of abuse they pass unregarded—may they never fear the *bodkin* of *minions*.

"8. THOMAS JEFFERSON—His enemies have *pelted* him—his friends have *washed* him, and succeeding generations will view him as the brightest *Star* in our luminary.

"9. Our Typographical Brethren—May peace and good order *set* at their *boards*, and may the precepts of Franklin be deeply *impressed* on their minds.

"10. The enemies of America, domestic and foreign — May they be *capp'd* in the *pelt tub*, *rubbed* over with *lye*, and receive a complete *scraping* from every true American.

"11. The reputation of our brethren—May he that *mackles* it, *be beaten black* as a *monk*; should he continue his aspersions, let him recollect the support of the *tympan*—the *gallows*.

"12. The Real American Seaman—May the *banks* of friendship reside in their bosoms—and may they distribute relief when the token of distress is held out.

"13. The American Fair—The *Flowers* and *Ornaments* of the Human Race—When the great *Founder* cast them, his best *specimen* was served out.

"14. *Pie, Hard. Pelts, Broken Ribs, and Cassie Quires*, to those who would produce dissention between employers and employed.

"15. May our actions have good *colour*; may the *impression* of integrity guide us; and may the *rules* of honor support us in every difficulty.

"16. Politics—They run *too high* and *too low*—to preserve an *even face* decorum should be observed.

"17. Our Association—Its *form* is *solid*—its *lines* are *justified* to a *hair space*; *locked* in the *chase* of friendship, what have we to fear from squabbles?

"18. THOMAS NEWTON—*Correctness* is his *rule*; his constituents impelled the *justification* of all *matter* at the last election. [Norfolk's congressman, 1801-30]

"VOLUNTEER TOASTS

"By GEORGE NESTOR—Clean *sheets* and dry *blankets* to our brethren.

"By STEPHEN P. ROSE—Our navy is of a nonpareil size; but if its services should be wanting, its enemies will be taught that they have a large fount of cannon, which, by well distributed balls, will teach them that no imposition will be permitted.

"By CHARLES ARLINGTON—Innovating Printers—a second apprenticeship to their worships—may they be confined in their useful labors to a short candle, and *empty case*, a *crooked rule*, and an *uneven stick*—Provided with such apparatus, at the end of their Servitude, the *justifying line* of a *Printer's Devil* will accompany their composition.

"NOTE—The *Italicised* words are technical terms."

Normally, the partisan perspective of the attendees can be discerned from the phraseology used. But here, the participants mentioned worked in either the Federalist *Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger* office of John Cowper (110) and William Davis (127), or the Republican *Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald* office of James O'Connor (317). Daniel Baxter (027) was the foreman at the *Herald* press, while George Nestor (311) served the same function at the *Ledger* press; Stephen P. Rose (363) was a journeyman in the *Ledger* office who removed to Baltimore after that paper closed in 1816. Accordingly, the toasts show mild disagreement over national political issues, while reflecting common local concerns over maritime trade, the city's life blood, in the wake of the Chesapeake-Leopard affair three years before, and the continuing predations against American shipping then in the Atlantic.

This report on the association dinner appeared only in the *Norfolk Herald*, which is expected given Baxter's prominence here; he was then the printer of longest standing in town, and would be the oldest journeyman in the state on his death in 1836. Yet of those mentioned, Baxter is the only tradesman whose life can be traced that completely. Nestor and Rose are known mostly from their published death notices. But no further evidence of Arlington's life is known beyond that supplied by this chronicle; he was, quite simply, one of the numerous, anonymous journeymen who populated the printing offices in early Republic America.

No Personal Data yet discovered.

Sources: *Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald* (6 July 1810).