

Bookseller in Norfolk in 1815.

Page is known to have been a part of Virginia's print trade from a series of advertisements in Norfolk's newspapers for his "New & Cheap Book Store" in the summer of 1815. Yet that three-month-long run also comes at the end of a nineteen-month presence in those same papers, leaving unknown his history before and after those published notices.

It appears that Page became a bookseller in Norfolk as a result of his occupation as a school-master. This practice was a recurring one among educators in early-Republic Virginia, as it helped to assure the availability of the textbooks that they assigned to their students while augmenting the meager income they derived from their schools.

In this case, Page opened a "School for the instruction of Young Ladies" in February 1814. His school's first quarter (13 weeks) was evidently successful, as in May he then offered to "instruct a small Class of Boys in Latin or Greek" during late afternoons, even as he solicited students for the second quarter of his "Female School." However, at the end of that second quarter in August, he was compelled to delay the third "on account of the present situation of this place," meaning the chaos created there by the British invasion of the Chesapeake in July that resulted in the burning of Washington two weeks before Page announced this suspension. He resumed instruction after the British withdrew in late September 1814, and seems to have found his services more in demand than before the interruption, as evinced by his advertising for an assistant in his school in April 1815.

Yet while the end of the War of 1812 prompted an increase in the enrollment of his school, it also apparently induced Page to broaden his focus to include selling books that matched the classical curriculum that he offered. It may be that he was pressed by competition from other private schools, with two other teachers advertising their services in Norfolk's papers in 1815. It may also be that he was encouraged by the local Presbyterian minister, Rev. John D. Paxton (1784-1868), a Rockbridge County native who was then a part of an effort to start a Lancastrian (or Monitorial) School in Norfolk. (Later, he was well-known as an anti-slavery minister in Kentucky and Indiana, who travelled extensively in the Middle East in the 1830s.) But whatever the reason, Page announced the opening of a new bookstore on Main Street at the end of July. Still, his patrons were evidently disconcerted by this additional venture, so much so that Page felt obliged to reassure them that he would:

"not be diverted by his new engagements, from his duties as Instructor; but will endeavor, with usual zeal and assiduity, to merit a continuance of their patronage."

Remarkably, this new venture was evidently built on a temporary foundation, literally. On August 15, Page published a lengthy list of the titles available at his bookstore. But then just two weeks later, he published a second notice seeking a new site "near the Market Square" for both his store and school, indicating that his Main Street lease would expire in October, so forcing their relocation.

The newspaper record suggests that Page was unsuccessful in that quest. After October 13, 1815, he no longer advertised in local papers and he is last mentioned in a notice published by another teacher, William Pope, when he moved his school into the space behind Page's store in late October. However, Pope soon closed his school, and offered a reorganized one in late December. That chronology indicates that Page and Pope both were displaced at the end of October, and that Page left the book trade behind at that time.

This narrative is based solely on advertising notices placed in two of Norfolk's newspapers, so leaving any other information about Page unknown. Tidewater Virginia was home to many families bearing that surname, particularly nearby Gloucester County, the seat of the branch headed by John Page (1743-1808), the late governor of the Commonwealth. Hence, Page's use of an initialized form of his name makes him essentially unidentifiable among that throng. All that can be said with any certainty about this bookseller is this summary of the notices he published over this brief period of time.

No Personal Data yet discovered.

Sources: Notices in *Norfolk Gazette & Publick Ledger* (1814-15) and [Norfolk] *American Beacon & Commercial Diary* (1815).