

ALEXANDRIA 01: Virginia Journal

- 01: The Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser (1784-1789)
 - 02: The Virginia Gazette and Alexandria Advertiser (1789-1793)
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The first newspaper published in Alexandria was the first new weekly issued in Virginia after the Revolutionary War outside of Richmond, It was also the first paper published in Virginia that did NOT assume the title of "Gazette" and so make a claim for a form of official status.

The Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser issued from the press of one George Richards (355) starting in February 1784. Richards was the first to establish a job-printing office in this Potomac River port in mid-to-late 1782, essentially as a branch of the Baltimore office of the noted printer and publisher William Goddard (1740-1817). Where Richards originated and trained is unknown, but as Goddard loaned him a press and type for this Alexandria office, a prior, undocumented relationship between the two is more than likely, perhaps as master and apprentice. As a result, Goddard was a partner in the firm of George Richards & Company in its early years. With such backing, Richards was able to take up journalism about eighteen months after he set up shop in Alexandria. The quick success of his *Virginia Journal* points to the need for such an advertiser in northern Virginia in the immediate post-war years, so proving the wisdom of the joint venture.

From the start, the *Virginia Journal* was largely apolitical, reflecting its publication during the decade before clear partisan divisions emerged in Virginia following ratification of the Philadelphia Constitution of 1787. It seems that Richards thought his weekly would become a miscellany in its non-advertising content; for the entire five years of his proprietorship, the *Journal's* masthead carried a motto paraphrased from Book II of Virgil's *Aeneid* -- "Huc undique gaza congeritur" [Here the treasure from all parts is gathered] -- omitting the line's original reference to the sacking of Troy ("Huc undique Troia gaza ... congeritur").

Yet, as with the short-lived *Norfolk Intelligencer* published at the start of the Revolutionary War, this journal was, first and foremost, a mercantile advertiser, an imprint designed to aid and advance the town's commerce, as its title clearly showed. Hence, it gradually became a voice for the political views of Alexandria's merchants, and so an early Federalist sheet.

By 1786, Goddard had resigned from his arrangement with Richards, apparently in order to refocus his attention on his own newspaper in Baltimore -- the *Maryland Journal* -- following a consolidation of its ownership in his hands alone in 1785. Richards found a new partner in one Thomas Bond (039), a Pennsylvanian who had moved to Alexandria to conduct a land-office, speculating in lands in the Morgantown area that he acquired through the military bounty warrants he had earned during the war. Newspaper advertising was a key part of his business, and joining with Richards gave him ready access at less-than-going rates. The two were still allied in July 1789 when the printer died unexpectedly.

"Hasty was the summons which called him from this terrestrial Scene, --- as the Day previous to his Dissolution, he was walking the Streets, little suspecting the King of Terrors to be so near at Hand!"

Bond promptly joined with Samuel Hanson (200), a war-time friend he knew in Philadelphia, to continue operating the *Journal*; Hanson was the scion of a major Maryland family, who relocated to Alexandria in 1786 to conduct a dry-goods and forwarding business there with his brother Thomas. As with Bond's business, his was dependent on newspaper advertising, and he may have already had an interest in the *Journal* – one of the anonymous backers, like Bond, of George Richards & Company. After a three-week-long suspension, the new firm of Hanson & Bond renewed publication of Richards' weekly, though with a change in title from *Journal* to *Gazette*. The partners now claimed an authority that Richards had not asserted, implying a more grandiose outlook for the new proprietors of what was George Washington's local newspaper – someone well known by both men. As neither partner was a trained printer, the brevity of the paper's hiatus indicates that the break continued only as long as it took for the two men to find and employ a new tradesman.

Initially, the recast *Virginia Gazette and Alexandria Advertiser* did not make use of a motto as Richards had. But in October 1790, Hanson & Bond adopted a passage from a popular poem as their axiom:

"Oh! Thou, by whose Almighty Nod the Scale
Of Empire rises, or alternate falls,
Send forth the SAVING VIRTUES round the Land!"

Their choice of this verse from "Summer," the second poem in the four-part *The Seasons* by the Scottish poet James Thomson (1700-1748), suggests a dissatisfaction with the emerging partisan divisions developing over the Washington administration's policies, both foreign and domestic. A common trope articulated by supporters of those policies, later known as Federalists, was a complaint about the lack of virtue among their opponents. As supporters and friends of Washington, Hanson and Bond undoubtedly embraced that view and were here proclaiming their paper as a source of political virtue.

Still, both partners would eventually be pulled away from their journalistic venture. Hanson was named Surveyor of Customs for Alexandria in the new Federal government by now-president Washington shortly after they took control of the *Gazette and Advertiser*. At that same time, Bond took up residence in Morgantown, close to where the bulk of his land sales occurred. So while their alliance continued until late 1793, Bond had only intermittent contact with their Alexandria printing office. The partnership came to an end in November 1793 when Bond sold out to Hanson, with their weekly ceasing publication at about that same time; Hanson then moved his press across the Potomac to Georgetown, Maryland, where he began publishing *The Columbian Chronicle* on December 3, 1793, with the help of hired hands, apparently employing the subscriber list he retained from his association with Bond. Hanson continued that new journal there with various partners until May 1796.

The partnership dissolution and Hanson's subsequent removal was clearly a case of reacting to altered circumstances. In November 1792, a competing twice-weekly newspaper had appeared in Alexandria: *The Columbian Mirror* (Alexandria 02) of John Smith (389) and Ellis Price (342). Over the course of the ensuing year, the *Columbian Mirror* slowly ate into the advertising revenue of the *Gazette and Advertiser*, while it also adopted a more strident political tone favoring the administration. Simultaneously, construction had begun on the

new "federal city" on land adjacent to Georgetown. Both of these factors made it appealing for Hanson to move the *Gazette and Advertiser* across the river. And with that relocation, the first newspaper issued in Alexandria ceased to be.

Sources: LCCN Nos. 84-024726, 84-024725; Brigham II:1111-12. See also Brigham, *Journals and Journeymen* and entries on Richards, Hanson, and Bond in *Artisans and Merchants*.