

ALEXANDRIA 03: Alexandria Expositor

- 01: The Times and Alexandria Advertiser (1797-1799)
 - 02: The Times; and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser (1799-1802)
 - 03: The Times; and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser (1802)
 - 04: Columbian Advertiser and Commercial, Mechanic, and Agricultural Gazette (1802)
 - 05: Alexandria Expositor and the Columbian Advertiser (1802-1803)
 - 06: Alexandria Expositor and the Columbian Advertiser (1803-1804)
 - 07: Alexandria Expositor and the Columbian Advertiser (1804-1805)
 - 08: The Alexandria Expositor (1805)
 - 09: The Expositor (1805-1806)
 - 10: The Expositor (1806-1807)
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The first daily newspaper published in Alexandria was also an avowedly political one. It was a journal that targeted Jeffersonian readers in the Alexandria area, rather than appealing to the interests of Federalist merchants there, as then did the port's only other paper. The new daily was also a paper that was uniquely built on the patronage of Alexandria's booksellers.

The daily's founder, John V. Thomas (410) was a native of northern Virginia who had built a sizable bindery and bookstore on Royal Street between 1794 and 1797. That business gave him a clear understanding of the limited advertising choices in the port, as then embodied in the thrice-weekly *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette* of Ellis Price (342) and Henry Gird Jr. (181); while their four-year-old journal was considerably more capacious than had been the preceding *Virginia Gazette and Alexandria Advertiser* of Samuel Hanson (200) and Thomas Bond (039), the *Mirror* still did not have adequate space to meet the multiplying demand for advertising, especially among smaller retail businesses like Thomas's. Nor did Hanson & Bond exhibit a political outlook consistent with that of many, if not most of their readers beyond the city's boundaries. Rather the paper reflected the views and interests of its larger merchant supporters, and not its agrarian consumers. So in the winter of 1796-97, Thomas conducted a search for an experienced printer as a partner in a venture that would publish a daily competitor to the *Mirror* that offered added, cheaper advertising space, as well as a differing political voice.

By March 1797, Thomas had found such a partner in a Philadelphia-trained printer named James D. Westcott (437). He had recently ended a year-long association with *The Argus and New-Jersey Centinel* in his hometown of Bridgton, New Jersey, and was now seeking a more viable and visible publishing role in or near the budding national capital. The new partners set up a printing office adjacent to Thomas's bookstore and bindery, and began advertising their intention to publish *The Times and Alexandria Advertiser* as soon as they had obtained a sufficient number of subscribers. That their new daily appeared just five weeks later, on April 10th, shows how readily they found such support for their proposed journal. Key parts of that support can be seen in the lengthy advertisements placed in the paper by the town's

booksellers, Thomas among them, for the entire decade of the journal's run (1797-1807); such notices often monopolized the back page of the paper throughout that era.

In their introductory address to readers, Thomas & Westcott stated that they thought it was "unnecessary" to explain the utility of a daily newspaper in such a vibrant mercantile locale, as the "peculiar advantages" such a journal possessed were "sufficiently obvious." Rather, they wanted potential subscribers to know of their commitment to the "early circulation of news, particularly commercial information" that the *Mirror* was unable to provide as it was then published. In anticipation of modern journalistic practices, they promised that *The Times* would, in summer, "be served to the subscribers at an early hour in the morning, and contain the matter brought by the Northern and Southern posts of the preceding evening."

The Times and Alexandria Advertiser evidently achieved a quick success, as the competing *Columbian Mirror* soon experienced severe financial difficulties. In February 1798, Price, a Federalist merchant, sold his interest in the paper to Gird, a Dublin-trained printer, in order to reorganize his finances; Gird then further undermined the paper's viability by opening the *Mirror's* pages to an intensifying anti-slavery campaign pressed by local Quakers, such as Samuel Janney; Price was pressured by his merchant friends to reacquire the *Mirror* from Gird so as to quiet the uproar and did so in December 1799. But Price had not yet attained financial solvency and taking on the *Mirror's* indebtedness again forced that issue quickly; he sold the newspaper once more in September 1800 in an effort to satisfy his creditors. The new owner, William Fowler (173), quickly discovered just how poor the fiscal health of the *Mirror* had become and so closed the journal at the end of 1800, selling its assets to the Baltimore-born firm of Samuel Snowden (393) and Matthew Brown (057). These two arch-Federalist publishers promptly issued their own political daily, the *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer*, to counter the Jeffersonian daily founded by Thomas & Westcott three years before.

Transitions

By that time, however, *The Times* was published without the involvement of its instigator, John V. Thomas. He apparently committed to a simple two-year partnership with Westcott in April 1797, and so in April 1799, just as the tumult over the Alien & Sedition Acts grew to a fever pitch, the bookseller sold his interest in *The Times* to John Westcott Sr., his partner's father, who evidently had relocated to Alexandria from New Jersey in anticipation of the end of the partnership. Once in the Westcott family's hands, *The Times* became a far more controversial journal, which led to a knife attack on the younger Westcott in an Alexandria street by a Federalist sympathizer in May 1799, and an ensuing armed invasion of his home by his attacker's friends who threatened his young wife and family over promised criminal complaints. That attempt at intimidation apparently made the Westcotts more determined to challenge the Federalist administration of John Adams and its local supporters.

In 1800, the Westcotts joined an effort organized by the leaders of Virginia's Republican party to create a network of papers in the state in support of the presidential campaign of Thomas Jefferson; that August, James D. Westcott issued a joint proposal with James Lyon (274), manager of that statewide effort, to publish a nationally-circulated paper entitled *The*

National Cabinet in neighboring Georgetown. Yet when the *Cabinet* finally did appear that December, after the presidential election, the younger Westcott was not named as either an owner or contributor; Lyon had scaled back his grandiose plans after learning that his *Cabinet* would not be the official voice of the incoming administration, as he had hoped. (That coveted role went to the *National Intelligencer* published by Samuel Harrison Smith.) Still, it appears that the Westcotts remained a vital part of Lyon's network in the capital area, particularly in their later associations with Dr. Richard Dinmore (139) a Washington bookseller who became Lyon's partner in 1801. Accordingly, the Westcotts' daily remained an independent entity for the first year of the Jefferson administration.

The paper's fortunes would change dramatically in 1802. The elder Westcott had agreed to a three-year partnership with his son in publishing the paper, an agreement that expired on May 1, 1802. So the younger Westcott was obliged to purchase his father's interest in *The Times* in order for the patriarch to retire from the daily journalistic grind to focus on his Alexandria bookselling business. Almost immediately, the son discovered that he could not sustain the effort alone, whether financially or physically. As a result, he was compelled to transform his daily paper into a thrice-weekly journal entitled *The Columbian Advertiser and Commercial, Mechanic, and Agricultural Gazette* at the end of July 1802. Yet Westcott noted in the first issue of his down-sized journal that a daily paper was essential in the port town, and that he was eager to resume his former frequency "whenever the state of affairs may render the measure necessary and expedient." Clearly, the presence of the rival *Alexandria Advertiser*, with its appeal to the Federalist-leaning merchant class there, and the depletion of the son's resources in buying out his father, meant that James D. Westcott faced financial collapse in the fall of 1802, despite the continued popularity of his paper.

The troubled publisher turned to James Lyon for help. Most of Lyon's expansive print-trade ventures in Washington had come to naught earlier that year, and now the fiery political editor wanted to acquire a well-known Republican journal to bring him back into national prominence as a partisan journalist; Lyon convinced Richard Dinmore, his partner in many of those print-trade projects in the capital, that they should buy Westcott's journal. So on November 22nd, Westcott ended the five year run of his Alexandria newspaper and sold its subscriber list to the firm of Lyon & Dinmore, though retaining his press for the use of his bookselling father; then on November 24th, the new owners published the first issue of their restyled *Alexandria Expositor and Columbian Advertiser* as its lineal successor. The sale evidently left Westcott relieved and encouraged; he reported in his valedictory address to his readers that he was happy to be "retiring from a business so unpleasant in its nature and arduous in its execution," though he was also satisfied that the journal would remain a vigorous supporter of Republicanism in the hands of Lyon and Dinmore. Even as he retired from journalism, Westcott remained an active political figure, eventually returning to his native New Jersey to serve in elective statewide office as a leader of the state's Jacksonians; his sons and nephews were also leading Jacksonian figures in their own rights during the early years of Florida's statehood.

Over the ensuing two years, the *Alexandria Expositor* took on an even sharper tone against Jefferson's opponents, an unsurprising turn given Lyon's inclinations. While that tone drew considerable fire from the surviving Federalist newspapers in the area, the recast paper had

a considerable reach across the country. From its start, the *Expositor* issued an edition "for the country," initially as a weekly while the parent journal was a thrice-weekly publication, then as a thrice-weekly issue when the *Expositor* began daily publication in December 1803. Pieces from the journal also appeared in the *American Literary Advertiser*, a weekly paper that Lyon and Dinmore had started in Georgetown in March 1802, and brought with them to Alexandria when they bought Westcott's paper. Thus just one year into their conduct of the *Expositor*, Lyon and Dinmore could consider other publishing ventures, both individually and jointly, a result of the growth in their revenues. Those funds allowed Lyon to sustain publication of a Savannah, Georgia, weekly that he started in August 1802 with Connecticut printer Samuel Morse. They also allowed the partners to propose publishing an English-language, twice-weekly journal in New Orleans with the December 1803 transfer of the Louisiana Territory to the United States. When the publication of that distant paper was realized, Lyon became its resident proprietor, unlike his absentee arrangement in Georgia, so leaving production of the *Expositor* to Dinmore alone. By May 1804, it had become clear that the days of the firm of Lyon & Dinmore were numbered; at that time, Lyon bought out Dinmore's share in the New Orleans paper; and then in August, Dinmore bought out Lyon's interest in the *Expositor*, becoming the sole proprietor of the Alexandria daily.

Initially, there was little change manifested in the *Expositor*. Dinmore continued its pointed critiques of Federalists, which brought criticism down on his head as being a "tool of Lyon." But his partner had left the capital, never to return in a journalistic capacity, so making the paper one reflecting Dinmore's opinions. Still, this period of his print-trade career would be the most difficult one, even as the English-born physician finally attained full control over the fruits of his labors. In the midst of his break-up with Lyons, his wife died, leaving him to care for an infant daughter. Furthermore, his health, never considered robust as a result of a sickly childhood, now began to deteriorate, especially with recurring episodes of gout. In response to both, Dinmore moved to reduce the stress on him personally. Twice, he slowed the frequency of the *Expositor's* publication, first from daily to thrice-weekly with the 1804 departure of Lyon, then to twice-weekly in November 1805. In March 1806, he resumed his former thrice-weekly pace, likely indicating new investment in hired hands rather than any recovery of his health. And that summer he remarried, taking the widowed daughter of his stepmother as his new wife and care-provider. So for the next year, his business appears to have continued smoothly; but the number of extant copies of Dinmore's *Expositor* shrinks steadily for those numbers issued later in that year, suggesting that he reduced the paper's quantity rather than its frequency to keep the venture afloat financially in 1806.

Decline and Demise

Sometime after June 1, 1807, Dinmore suspended publication of his five-year-old *Expositor* to reorganize his business and finances. The event proved to mark the end of the *Alexandria Expositor*, for when Dinmore's journal reappeared in mid-November, it issued from his new office in Washington and was recast as the *Washington Expositor and Weekly Register*.

The move appears to have been tied to Dinmore's failing health, a losing battle with cancer. His new office was much closer to his home on G Street than had been his Alexandria one, and he quickly engaged a new partner in William Cooper – another District bookseller, as he

had been – to act as the firm's managing partner. After just a year together, the pair ceased publishing the paper permanently in order to concentrate solely on book and job-printing; and after one more year, the two dissolved their partnership and went their separate ways. Dinmore retired entirely from the print trade at that point, clerking in various government departments thereafter, before dying at his Washington home in September 1811.

In consequence of Dinmore's removal, Alexandria was served for the ensuing four years by a single journal – the Federalist *Alexandria Gazette* of Samuel Snowden – just as the city had been before the daily of Thomas & Westcott first issued in 1797. Snowden would not see another Republican challenger to his primacy there until the birth of the *Alexandria Herald* of John Corse (106) and Nathaniel Rounsavell (367) in June 1811.

Sources: LCCN nos. 83-026150, 83-026151, 85-025025, 85-034328, 86-077175, 86-071533, 84-26746, and 92-56701; MESDA Index nos. 39649 & 39650; Brigham; *Artisans & Merchants*; Croggon, *History of Southeast*; Nelson, *New Jersey Printers*; Cushing, *History of ... Cumberland, New Jersey*; *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*; Austin, *Matthew Lyon: Ames, National Intelligencer*; Bryan, *National Capital*; articles in [Alexandria] *Columbian Mirror* (1794-99), *The Times and Alexandria Advertiser* (1797-1802); [Washington] *Centinel of Liberty*, (1799-1801); the *Alexandria Gazette* (1800-23), *Alexandria Expositor* (1802-07); [Washington] *National Intelligencer* (1801-23); and *Washington Expositor* (1807-09).